

DEATHREALM

THE LAND WHERE HORROR DWELLS

ISSUE #13, FALL/WINTER 1990

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DEATHIRIALM

THE LAND WHERE HORROR DWELLS

ISSUE #13 FALL/WINTER, 1990
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This issue dedicated to
Dave Wilbur's
effortless.

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Back in July, **DEATH-RECALM** sponsored **DEATHCON II: The H.P. Lovecraft Centennial Baroque**. And what a time: A whole mess of folks piled into the Rainey house, for a feast of Nyarlathotep, Ribs, Ears of Azathoth, Creal Old Ones on a Stick, and Yog-Sothoth Fudding. Yumm. Included in the unruly mob were famous people like Fred Chappell, Elizabeth Massie, Scott Yost, Bill Trotter, James Robert Smith, Jeff Williams (of the new **MESSIAH** Newsletter), artist Mark Kinsley, and Basil G. Pigg. The highlight of the evening was when one of our neighbors, having spotted the big **DEATH-RECALM** sign that I put up to mark our location for newcomers, came over to ask if we were a bunch of Satanists—a no joke. Since his daughter and my daughter play together, he was concerned that we might be up to something “dangerous.” For the record, **DEATHCON II** was NOT a Satanist convention, nor was it a gathering to sacrifice babies or anything, though there were certainly a couple of children in the house that I’d have happily thrown on the grill. Hey, if we were devil worshippers, common sense would dictate that we not put up a big sign in the middle of a fairly populous, conservative neighborhood. † This incident gave me paws to think on how intolerant so much of this great, “free” society has become. Some readers may know already of the **DARK SIDE** story; editor Shannon Riley ran into a fair amount of trouble in her hometown because of the nature of her magazine—one not so different from **DEATH-RECALM** in content. The morality police immediately frowned on her. Her printer “lost” her copy for an issue; someone broke into her computer files and destroyed a large part of her database; a rock was thrown through the window of her home. Eventually, she made the decision to move, rather than give in to pressure and close down the magazine. Yeah, this is U.S.A., c1990. While I personally have had

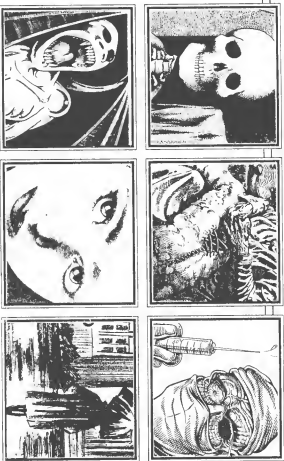
no such problems, reports of this type of harassment are becoming more and more common. I ask you, who has the “morality” problem—the one publishing fiction (I stress this word; it means imaginary, fabricated, NOT REAL), or the one who by violence tries to put a halt to something they don’t like or understand? † From what I’ve seen of 1990 so far, I think the state of the nation can be summed up by the phrase “Common Sense Takes a Holiday.” To my readers, I implore you: don’t contribute to the problem. Keep yourselves educated. Don’t let closed-minded, tiny-brained wipers of other people’s bottoms trample your first amendment freedom. Mind you, I don’t advocate immorality. I don’t advocate pushing the first amendment to its limit just for its own sake. Going to that extreme tends to be very immature and counterproductive. There are a lot of pretty wicked things going around in the media that I don’t want anything to do with, especially when it might concern my daughter. But the answer is NOT across-the-board legislation, and vigilantism—the view more and more embraced by conservatives in this country. You can’t legislate morality, as all you intelligent people know. What you can do is educate people, and *influence* morality in a positive way. That would be my idea, at least. I guess it’s wishful thinking, though, since having a brain in your head is not the trendy thing. † Anyway, the **DEATHCON II** “incident” was to laugh. If not for Mr. Neighbor, it might have been just another party. For aless, we ran from *Beyond and Trindly a Still my Name*—some double feature, oh! And thanks to Bill Trotter for his fabulous Unamable Beans. † Next time: Jeffrey Oser’s sequel to *Snowflight* (**DEATH-RECALM #41**), as well as fiction by Barb Hendee and Jeffrey Thomas.

Till then.
Mark Rainey

Mark Rainey

Hang something nasty on your wall.

1991 THE YEAR IN DARKNESS WALL CALENDAR



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Marge B. Simon
Ocala, FL

I JUST FINISHED *DEATHREALM #12* and could not put it down! Fantastic stories and art. Best yet, and I'm sure I've said that before, but this ish contained some fine reading not only in terms of shockers but in variety of approaches. I commend you on your overall "theme" that seems to create a mood mixing horror with mundane life situations, mostly urban, or centering around a city or town, with just the barest hint of sf brass on it, especially with *New Order—bravo* on your collaboration with Andrea Locke! *Tincture* (a remarkable approach to unveiling a story, and Kyle-Keith makes it work—delightful) and *Birds of Fire* were other favorites that are reminiscent of say, an Ellison influence.

Borkowski's artwork for *Tincture* strikes bold and true, complementing the strong build-up for the conclusion. Your cover and inside front covers are works of art too. I wondered how you achieved that effect on the inside front cover! (Where is that terrific chair, anyway! (Please note that *The Screaming Chair's Inmate Sister* was taken by H. E. Faust of Chicago. I suspect the chair resides in his attic—Ye Ed!))

Cerberding, Oster and Standish contributed more gems, again varying with attention to impact. What a pleasure to appreciate.

I hope you can continue to find such excellent material—you've had no problem with that, obviously!

Harry E. Faust
Oak Park, IL

ISSUE #12 WAS quite good and I dug the cover photo special. It's always good when you can find objects which in themselves have that look of paratacting of the outside. The writing throughout was impressive. *New Order* was a weird kink and *Tincture* was my urban paranoia twitch. For sheer brevity and strangeness, though, *Little Lucas* was my favorite. Just the thing to tell my

nephews as a bedtime story. Cerberding's illustration was also excellent. Was also pleased with the display of my work. Excellent job by Precision Typographers.

Robert Baldwin
La Canada, CA

ITL NEVER FELT guilty again after reading *DEATHREALM #12* and seeing its consequences in Rick Kiehl's creepy, crawly *Embarrassment & Revenge*. This was a smooth flowing, gripping tale with a slick ending and interesting characters. Great story for the number one slot.

Tincture by Roger Kyle-Keith was a nice slice of everyday big-city life and its senseless violence, in a futuristic setting. It was a bit of a challenge sorting the many characters at first, but well worth the effort.

The other two I especially enjoyed were Gary Phillips' infernal tale of terror *Birds of Fire* and Andrea Locke & Friends' *New Order*, the tale of a man suddenly obsessed with cleansing the city of "bad bacteria." Strange things happen when you walk around Chicago, even after the rain has passed, without an umbrella. Nice tale, Mark.

From the giraffe cake cover to the inside-out, twisting, fanged, man-eating, gnarly, pus-sack deformity on the back cover, you were thoroughly successful in grossing me out and affording me several hours of great reading. I will think Jeff needs to seek some professional help.

My thanks comes in the form of a check for the renewal of my subscription. Keep knocking us dead, Mark.

Tim Walters
Muskegon, OK

THE STORY BY Rick Kiehl (*Embarrassment & Revenge*) has an interesting concept, guilt manifesting itself in physical symptoms. If guilt comes on that ugly, I would hate to see how envy or jealousy would show up.

The tale was rather nauseating. I do not care for gore used just for the sake of gore. That is what has ruined the genre, particularly in films. But if something distasteful is essential to the plot, rather than just for shock factor, that is quite different.

Kiehl effectively constructs a story where you have some empathy for the protagonist, therefore the "gross out" is much more effective. If you have no feeling for a character, then he can vomit live worms for pages, all to no avail. Using gore to cover a poor plot by an untalented writer is as ineffective as Jim's feeble attempts to cover his worm-producing wound with a napkin. I found the Kiehl tale to be a fine piece of work, though. I thought the ending left something to be desired.

William H. Puginie
Seattle, WA

DEATHREALM #12, AS always, is superb. That cover is so wonderful it makes me want to sit down and write a story about it. That chilling demonic face, the blend of shades, the simple yet sinister aspect of it really got to me.

Rick Kiehl's story is the kind of twisted, grotesque and amusing sort of story I now expect to find in *DEATHREALM*. The story flows, the events are so outrageous and fascinating that you just keep reading, entranced, until you reach the end, an end that is in itself a beginning to yet greater horrors, ones that you contemplate. This helps the story to linger in one's mind.

Tincture, also, did nothing for me. I can tell that it is well done, but the story in itself failed to catch my fancy. *Birds of Fire* had a nice Lovecraftian feel to it. *Little Lucas* was utterly bizarre and endearing.

New Order was my favorite story this issue. It has a lot of meat and is extremely odd and imaginative. I like how it begins, with its air of subtle mystery, and then proceeds to get more and more strange. Then, when Geoffrey thrusts the nails into his chest and head, it is utterly shocking. The story is filled with excellent descriptions, everything is realized and comes to life.

I was surprised that Edlman's story did not catch my interest. For some reason it seems to meander along without coming alive.

The art is very good, especially the backcover and page 38.

Ronald Kally
Pegram, TN

REALLY DID ENJOY *DEATHREALM #12*. As usual, the fiction, art, and poetry was first rate, as well as the magazine and book review columns. As for the news about *DEATHREALM*'s price increase to \$4.00, I say "So what?" *DEATHREALM* has offered superior quality work between two covers for a very modest price for nearly four years now. I figure it's only right that we start now, I figure it's only right that we start

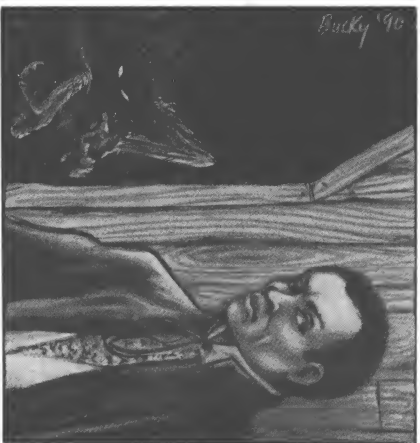
paying a fair price for all the employment that Rainey bestows upon his readership on a regular basis (just receiving an issue of a small press magazine that comes out precisely when it is supposed to is worth an extra fifty cents to me). (Well, not quite precisely...I hope the rest of my readers are as supportive—Ye Ed!)

Rick Kiehl's *Embarrassment & Revenge* was an extremely disturbing story with an Osier-type feel to it. Not the kind of story you would want to read before a big meal. Unfortunately, I did and guess what was on the menu that night...spaghetti! Afterwards, I didn't know whether to reach for the Alka-Seltzer or the Har's dog de-wormer.

Birds of Fire was a well-crafted story. Phillips really did a great job with it. Edlman's *True Love...* was an interesting tale with a little black humor thrown in for good measure. And I got a kick out of McKenzie's *Little Lucas*, too. It had a nice Southern air to it and was very effective for its length.

It's nice to see more writers using Southern settings for their fiction these days (something that I personally can't get enough of). I suppose my favorite story of the issue would have to be *New Order* by the team of Locke and Rainey. Unlike most horror stories, which end on a fatalistic note, this tale possessed a strong sense of hope and social responsibility which was refreshing.

(Continued on page 56)



BY THE VERY nature and eloquence of this writing, few would believe that I was once a man enslaved.

That fact alone may cause some men to dismiss the validity of my story entirely, their suspicion of the negro race conquering their potential for open-mindedness. But the tale that this testament holds is truth. I swear by God that it is. Surely it might have remained untold for all time—and perhaps it was so—but a dying man must purge his troubled soul. Therefore, I take pen in hand and cleanse my own of the stain of that horrid incident some sixty years ago.

I first came to know the name of Bellamere in the mid-1800s. Since my birth I had been bound body, mind, and soul to the

possession of another man...in fact, several over a twenty-five-year period. When gold had once again exchanged hands and I was bought by the family of Bellamere, I was a husband and father. Fortunately, the elder Bellamere was a man of compassion and not one to break up the family unit, putting so much faith and stock in his own. So, without ceremony, the three of us, my wife Camilla, my son, Jeremiah, and I, were delivered to the Bellamere estate. We arrived with the obvious fears and expectations, figuring to be cast into yet another dismal world of cotton fields, slave shackles, and cruel overseers.

However, much to our surprise, life with the Bellameres was nearly idyllic. Unlike our more unfortunate counterparts of dark

descent, our servitude was pleasant and without conflict. There were no chains, no whippings, and never once did we hear the word "nigger" cross our master's lips. Since the Bellameres' wealth was one of inheritance rather than livelihood produced by cotton or sugar cane, the extent of the plantation and its grounds were simply there for the family's comfort and leisure. I was dressed in the finest of garments, taught the most impeccable of manners, and transformed from an ignorant field hand into a poised and proper butler. Camilla attended to the cooking and housework, while Jeremiah, then a small boy, took care of the stables.

Another benefit of serving the Bellameres was their uncustomary interest in our education, or rather our lack of it. Sebastian Bellamere and his wife, Catherine, possessed an immense library of both ancient and current volumes. All manner of books and periodicals were made available to us. While my former masters had deliberately kept my family and I in intellectual darkness—a common practice in the South during that period, generated more out of fear than hatred—the Bellamere clan seemed to encourage our pursuit of knowledge. The Bellameres' only daughter, Emily, had hopes of becoming a school teacher someday and we were her first pupils. We became well versed in the classics, reading Dickens, Shelly, and Keats, and studying the histories and philosophies of the world. I would not be perming this testament this very evening if Miss Emily's tutorial guidance had not left such a lasting impression.

And we were offered companionship as well. Camilla shared activities with Lady Catherine and Miss Emily, while I often went quail hunting with Master Sebastian and his eldest son, Collin. And the Bellameres' youngest child, Martin, was my son's bosom buddy. He and Jeremiah made the whole of the Bellamere estate their private playground, climbing trees, skimming jumping in the fish pond, and playing their favorite game, marbles, in the earthen circle drawn for that purpose beneath one of the garden's great, spreading magnolia trees.

So what went wrong? Why were we not allowed to live out the remainder of our

lives in such a paradise, void of prejudice and strife? I have asked myself that question often over the years. Perhaps if I had paid closer attention, I could have foreseen the catastrophe to come. Perhaps if I had not been so blinded by my loyalty to the Bellameres, I might have been able to do something to alter the course of events that led to the downfall of that most unoffensive and gentle of Southern families.

The history of the Bellameres was very much a mystery to me, as it was to most everyone in that part of Mississippi. From their accent and customs, it was obvious that they were originally of foreign lineage, most likely British. It was also known that the family had left their native country under the shadow of some great scandal. Sometimes, when partaking of strong drink, Sebastian would slip and mention "cuck" and some terrible "shame" that had forever tarnished the family name. He never elaborated on precisely what shame was, only that it had taken place during wartime. My suspicion was that cowardice was the black mark of which he spoke, since Sebastian and his family were of an overly reclusive and gentle nature. They had very little to do with the neighboring planters and whatever business was done in Vicksburg was performed by myself. Collin and Emily had no interest in people their own age and never attended any of the dances or social functions prevalent during those days of antebellum grace. And young Martin shunned the neighboring children, finding companionship only in the company of my son.

The only other clue I had to the family's mysterious background was something discovered in the Bellamere library. It was a journal belonging to one Woodrow Bellamere, grandfather to my master Sebastian. Woodrow had been a man of medicine, a scientist in the purist sense of the word. He had been most interested in the workings of the human mind and the chemical intricacies that caused negative behavior, such as paranoia, anxiety, and, as in the case of his own heritage, fear and timidity. It was known that the doctor had developed a serum to purge future generations of such weaknesses. A few of the passages even

hinted that Woodrow might have tested the concoction on himself. But from what I had witnessed of the Bellamere legacy, Woodrow's pursuit for genetic strength and stability had proven a dismal failure.

However, I did not allow their eccentricities to affect me. I respected the privacy they demanded and attended to my appointed duties. Camilla and Jeremiah did the same. For a while, things went pleasantly. Then a couple of incidents took place that were both puzzling and frightening to someone familiar with the mild nature of such people.

The first concerned Sebastian Bellamere himself. He and his wife rarely exchanged hostile words; rather, they seemed most loving and considerate of one another. Yet, one evening, their customary civility gave way to a heated argument. It concerned Catherine's desire to enroll Emily in a finishing school in Vicksburg and Sebastian's absolute refusal to allow the girl to venture from the solitude of the Bellamere household. The more Catherine pressed the matter, the angrier Sebastian came. His agitation was disturbing, for it was an emotion I had never seen grip the man before. I watched from the open door of the parlor as Sebastian's face grew deathly pale. And there was something else. His eyes—the whites of his eyes had grown blood red. No bloodshot like those of a drunken man, but pure blood red, only the pupils showing in contrast to the surrounding crimson orbs.

Sebastian took a trembling step toward the lady, his hand aloft and balled into a fist. I am certain he would have struck her if I had not stepped into the room and drawn his attention. The man turned and regarded me with a fury that could only be described as murderous. At first, I thought he might take his anger out on me, but instead he stormed past, heading downstairs to the wine cellar. I followed at his urgent request and, soon, he and I were alone in the basement. There was an empty storage room at the rear of the dusty bottle racks, one with a sturdy oak door and iron lock. He instructed me to lock him within the windowless cell and not come to release him until early the next morning.

My protests only seemed to feed the fuel of his madness even more, so I complied and did as I was told. The following morning I returned to find him crumpled in a corner, his clothes disheveled, but his mind having regained its normal state of serenity.

The second event of this nature had to do with young Martin. He was only five years old at the time and, even then, small and frail for his age. While he and Jeremiah were out cavorting near a neighboring plantation one day, they strayed upon a broad cow pasture. Halfway across, a great black bull appeared from a wooded thicket and gave chase. Both children reached the safety of the bordering fence, but the frantic run had played havoc with poor Martin's nerves. By the time they returned home, the boy was overcome with fear and trembling. He was put to bed immediately. He developed a high fever the following day, but it did not seem to be from any form of sickness. Rather, it appeared that Martin was in the throes of some bizarre temper tantrum, as if his initial fear had bled away into a creeping rage.

Later that night, while the household slept, young Martin left his bed. Lady Catherine discovered his absence and alerted her husband. On horseback, Sebastian, Collin and I searched the expanse of the estate, but found nothing. Then instinct nagged at me and I suggested we ride to the pasture where the bull had chased the two boys. As the dawn came, we reached the field and found the child lying in the dewy clover, his nightgown torn and stained with blood. As father and brother carried the sleeping boy home, I lingered, wondering what had become of the mean-spirited bull. A short time later, I found out. The cold was swarmed in the wooded hollow, cold and dead. Its body had been torn open and its entrails scattered throughout the brambled thicket.

Nothing else of such a morbid and inexplicable nature happened again for a very long time. Like with the Bellamere family continued as smoothly as it had before, leaving only uneasy reflections of the strange incidents to linger in the dark corners of my mind.

Then came the conflict between aboli-

tionists and slaveowners. The Southern States seceded from the Union, the Confederacy was born, and the great Civil War tore the fabric of normal existence asunder.

Men of all ages and social distinction enlisted to fight the Yankee hordes that were sure to march across the Mason-Dixon line and put a halt to the ways of the Old South. The Bellamere men, however, did not. They remained neutral and refrained from the warring of the grey. They were content to make the Bellamere estate their private haven from war, intending to spend their time as usual; reading their books, hunting quail and fox, and living quietly and inconspicuously far from the roar of the cannons and the death screams of gunshot.

They were ridiculed for their decision at first. When rode onto the plantation the dead of night and good-evil them with curses and scorns, calling the Bellameres "yellow-bellied cowards" and "Yankee sympathizers." During each episode of violent taunting, Sebastian and Collin were locked in the wine cellar, their eyes flaring like red-hot coals with each cowering word.

Eventually, more and more marched off to fight the war in Virginia and Tennessee, and less and less found time to torment the family who wanted no part in the conflict. By the second year, the plantations and cotton mills around Vicksburg had grown quiet and deserted from disease and the Bellameres found themselves left alone, just as they wished to be.

And that was the way it remained...until a fateful night in the summer of 1863.

There had been much activity that day; the sound of marching troops and wagons on every road around the city and the roar of cannonfire from the wide channel of the Mississippi River. By nightfall, a division of Union cavalry was looping up the road from Vicksburg to lay waste to any plantation loyal to the Stars and Bars. When the procession of flaring torches could be seen from the windows of the main house, Sebastian

than Bellamere gave precise instructions as to what would be done. Rather than fight for their home and honor, he and Collin would retire to the security of the wine cellar as usual. The rest of the family along with me and my own, would hide in the upstairs parlor with orders to stay put no matter what transpired.

It did exactly as I was told. By the time the males had been locked in and the women and children were secure in the mansion's upper level, I watched from the upstairs window as a group of cavalrymen invaded the Bellamere property, leaving the rest of the division to conquer other pockets of resistance.

No one will resist you here, I thought as the soldiers dismounted and marched boldly to the mansion's front door. There is no one here but a few frightened women and children and a couple of drunken cowards hiding in the cellar.

But I was wrong about that. Very wrong. A Union colonel kicked at the door with his dusty boot. "Open up this rebel, or you traitorous rebels, or so help me I'll burn this house to the ground with you in it!"

There was the sound of breaking glass, the steady rasp of drawn swords, and the sound of wild laughter as soldiers—some drunk on confiscated spirits—began to ready themselves for the destruction of the massive structure of whitewashed wood and alabaster stone.

I looked to Lady Catherine. She looked frightened, but strangely enough, not because of the gathering military men around. She held Emily and Martin in her arms, but the gesture did not have the appearance of a mother's loving protection. Instead, she seemed to be holding them in restraint. The cracks of spinning wheels could be heard from somewhere downstairs. I was sure that the Unionmen had breached the security of the locked and bolted front door. But, upon listening further, I discovered that the noise was too muffled to be coming from the ground floor. No, it seemed to issue from

...The bull was sprawled in the wooded hollow, cold and dead. Its belly had been torn open and its entrails scattered throughout the brambled thicket....

some lower level. From the shadowy depths of the wine cellar.

Then came the most horrifying wall of pure rage that I had ever heard in my life. It was fury torn between the mortal soul of man and the raw bloodlust of the most primal of beasts. It barked up out of the pit of the man's black bowels, demanding to be wanted. Filling all who heard it with a fear so strong that it was as paralyzing as the venom of some exotic and deadly snake.

I turned and saw Emily and Martin then. Their faces were as pale as ash, their expressions contorted into a rictus of intense mental anguish. And their eyes... their eyes were the same shade of brilliant crimson as that which their father had exhibited that night so many years ago.

"I can't hold them any longer!" gasped Catherine, her slender arms surrounding the two struggling children. Emily and Martin ran for the door, their faces like those of demons, their hands curled into pale, fleshless claws. I moved to stop them, but the woman's voice cried out, "Let them go! Let them go or they will tear you apart!"

I stepped aside and they hit the door with such force that the lock was torn loose from its moorings. With careful wails that more resembled the fiftieth rages of breasts than that of innocent children, they disappeared down the stair-case to join in the conflict below.

And what a conflict it was. There came another crack and splinter of wood, again from the inside. There was the sound of the locked door being torn from its hinges and tossed aside. And there were screams. Lord in Heaven help me, I can still hear those awful screams of fear and torment shilling the night air, climbing higher and higher, pushing the limits of the human vocal cords, then faltering into choking silence. Only a few gunshots rang out and there was the clatter of hooves on the flagstones as a few of the horses escaped into the summer darkness. After the screams of dying men faded, all that could be heard was the maddening sound of flesh being ripped apart. That and the wailing chorus of earthbound banishes

performing atrocities in the outer courtyard.

After a time, the horrible noises ended. "Wait here," Catherine Belamere said, then, despite my protests, went downstairs alone. My family and I waited in the upstairs parlor, starting our ears. All that we could hear was the lad's gentle soothing voice and the sound of soft sobbing.

Minutes later, Catherine reappeared. Her gown was stained crimson with blood. Quietly, she avoided our questions and went to an iron safe in her husband's adjoining study. She opened the safe and withdrew a small bag of gold coins and a folded document. "Come with me," she said and the four of us went down to the ground floor of the Belamere house.

The marble floor was splattered with streaks of fresh blood, leading from the darkness of the courtyard beyond. "Stay here for a moment," Catherine requested. Her voice was cool, steady, despite the carnage all around her. As she slipped through the door of the downstairs sitting room, I caught a fleeting glimpse of huddled forms in the golden glow of a kerosene lamp. They were the forms of monsters, hideous fiends clad in blood-dyed rags. As the door swung closed, I watched as one of them locked my way, its eyes running the gamut from crimson to pink to eggshell white.

It was a demon I knew. A demon that possessed a familiar face, as well as a familiar voice. "Oh, what shame!" it moaned tearfully. "What sordid shame!"

A moment later, Lady Catherine exited the den. She handed me the gold sack and the folded paper. "Here is money and your freedom. Take a buggy and two strong horses from the stable and go. Never return to this house again, and for God's sake, never utter a word of what took place here this night."

Confused, we did as she said. We left the house and stood for a long and horrified instant in the courtyard beyond the abbey's rear columns of the Belamere mansion. In the pale glow of moonlight we laid eyes on the massacre that the Belameres' secret shame had brought about. Soldiers and horses lay everywhere, torn and broken,

like huge toys mangled by some vicious giant-child and cast aside. Fresh blood glistened in the nocturnal light, as well as the stark whiteness of denuded bone. As I quickly led my family past the awful scene of human devastation, I noticed that some of the bodies appeared to have been partially devoured.

As we made our way through the garden for the stable, the titter of childish laughter erupted from beneath the spreading magnolia tree. "Germie," called young Martin from the shadows, "Come play with me."

My son took a step toward the tree, but I pulled him back. Moonlight shone upon the dirt where the Belamere child croaked. His marble game was different that night from the countless times I had witnessed before. For instead of the colorful balls of glass, onyx, and agate, Martin shot the circle with huge black orbs that seemed slick and slimy in appearance. It took me a moment before I realized that we he played with were the gouged eyes of a cavalryman's horse.

We hitched two of the stable's finest steeds to a wagon and left that horrible place, escaping the federal soldiers by way of a desolate backroad. Although I have never spoken of that horrible night before this writing, I have thought about it many times. I have revisited the Belamere man-sion many times in my dreams, have heard the bestial screams of bloodlust and sniffled

the coppery scent of violent death in my nostrils. And I always wake with a scream trapped firmly behind my lips. Sometimes that scream escapes, like steam escaping from a boiler, saving my mind from the mounting pressure of certain insanity.

I am an old man now. I have lived past the conquering of the West, past the turn of the century, and now into the time of the Great War. I have watched the world progress before my aged eyes, have seen people live and die, including my own family. And I have watched for word regarding a particular surname.

That search has ended with a story from a recent newspaper, a report about a soldier by the name of Belamere who was court-martialed for crimes unspeakable, even by the conventions of war. I cannot help but wonder if that poor soldier is a distant offspring of the family I once knew and if he is damned with the same seed of shame that his ancestors were.

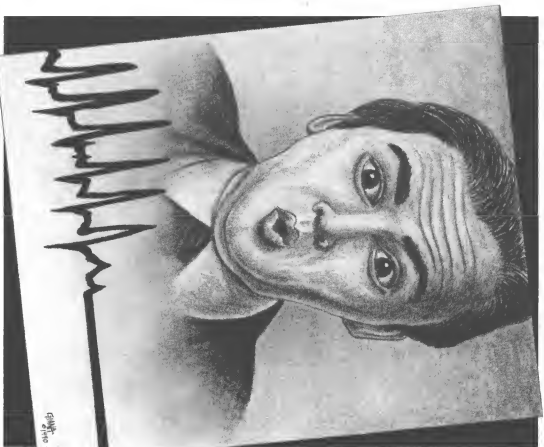
I lay here now, bedridden and ill, my frail hands unfolding a document yellowed and crumbling with age. It is the declaration of my freedom given to me some sixty years ago, my own private Emancipation Proclamation.

As I stare at the hastily scrawled signature at the bottom of the page, my heart grows heavy with uneasiness. For the name of sordidly Belamere is signed not in simple ink, but in the blood of a dozen slaughtered souls.



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nished in their webs of rampway and strategically-plotted shrubs, strobe-lit by the first sputtering ignition of streetlights. He also admitted from the relative comfort of his in-bound lane, the dense electric necklaces of outboard headlights, the quick hard gleam of wet pavement in front of columned arcades.

More than one of his advisors had urged him not to leave at this time. The Memorial Day weekend opening of his 2,000-acre family campground and full-gospel businessmen's conference center, The Pastures of His Peace, was only nine weeks off, and there were problems. Half of the hotel carpeting hadn't arrived yet, the fireworks contractor was trying to gouge him because his liability premium had just been raised, and some not-nosed columnist for the state's largest paper had already dubbed the park "Six Flags Over Jesus."

Maybe he should have stayed at the office to handle details, but that was what well-paid subordinates were for, was it not? The pressures of daily video taping were bad enough, but the nagging, endless details of the "Pastures" development were like jungle thickets: wearing him down, tripping him, impeding his progress through each and every day. Things were more complicated than they ever had been, and the stakes were higher. He needed a trip to Washington: he needed the release. If Mr. Sturdivant had not called him, Billy Wayne would have called Mr. Sturdivant.

But Sturdivant *had* called, and his terse, business-like message—"I have something new. Something I think will interest you greatly"—had started the blood hammering in Sedberry's ears.

He left the main streets behind and threaded his way through a labyrinth of elegant Georgetown lanes, slowing finally in order to pass through the narrow arch of a columned porte-cochère, into a cobbled and secluded courtyard. As soon as he had cleared the entrance, a black stretch limo with tinted windows nosed through in the opposite direction. Before the rear bumper passed into shadow, he noticed diplomatic plates—no, almost certainly—better that he could not.

Inside the confines of the courtyard, the Chevrolet's motor sounded surprisingly raucous. He quickly shut off the engine, retrieved his weekend suitcase from the back seat, then climbed out and just stood, nervous and expectant, staring at the shattered windows and ornately-sculpted entrance of a large townhouse. After a moment, he knew, the door would open; it always did. He did not know if there were hidden TV cameras trained on the courtyard or if some other unobtrusive surveillance method was employed, but he did know that his boss never left him standing there long enough to become truly uncomfortable. Just long enough to remind him of the priorities of their relationship.

The door opened. Mr. Sturdivant, as usual, was attired in a three-piece suit of conservative style and costly material. With his chilly smile, intelligent yet sardonic eyes, and vaguely Continental accent, he looked not unlike the *milieu d'* an overpriced but genuinely classy restaurant. Now that Sedberry thought of it, that analogy had some element of truth. Sturdivant's operation had class, and it certainly was expensive. Were Sturdivant's services overpriced? Sedberry tended to think not; that which is unique cannot be measured by the yardsticks one uses to measure value given in ordinary transactions.

"Welcome, Mr. Sedberry," Sturdivant crooned, extending a long cool hand. It was a measure of Sturdivant's subtlety that he always referred to his client as "Mister" rather than "Reverend," an acknowledgment, tactfully made, of the fact that Sedberry was here as a man, not as a religious leader.

Except for that first time they met, when Sturdivant had come up to Sedberry at the door to the committee cloakroom. His gaze had been both understanding and piercingly intimate. He grasped Sedberry's arm and said, "I watched you, Reverend Sedberry. I saw into your heart. You need not feel any shame. I assure you, there are other men who feel as you do—men of power and stature. I can serve your needs, as I serve theirs, with the utmost discretion." Then, observing that several members of the press had drifted into earshot, Sturdivant flashed

A PINCH OF SNUFF BY WILLIAM R. TROTTER

Secretion is ever the key, thought Reverend Billy Wayne Sedberry

as he scrutinized a row of rental cars behind the Hertz agency at Dulles International Airport. He chose a one-dark green Chevrolet, so anonymous-looking that it might well have come from some bureaucratic motor pool. Fifteen minutes later, under the ashes-of-roses sky

of a late winter twilight, he joined in the faster in-bound lane of Freeway traffic.

As always, the sight of Washington's architecture awakened in him sympathetic vibrations of power; he was a man, after all, who had breakfasted with a president and lunched with more senators and Congressmen than he could remember: those clean, massive geometries of granite and concrete,

a confidential smile and vanished into the crowd.

Sedberry was always reminded of that first conversation, each time Sturdivant ushered him into the townhouse's elegantly decorated interior. In a richly paneled living room, patterned after a Georgian men's club, Sturdivant took Sedberry's coat, poured him a drink, and pushed a hidden button which caused the room to be filled with soft music of precisely the kind Sedberry chose to listen to in the privacy of his own home. How had Sturdivant known that? From the beginning, he had known, that was all. In his three decades as a minister, Sedberry had known many Christians who pretended to powers they did not possess, but he had also known a few, a rare and powerful few, who truly had the gift of being able to read a man's soul from the briefest outward signs. Sturdivant's powers of observation, in this regard, were the keenest Sedberry had ever encountered.

"You said you had something special for me,"

"Indeed I have," replied Sturdivant in his softest voice. "Something I had thought was lost forever, an item of the utmost historical significance, of truly special resonance"—one of Sturdivant's favorite words, and one which he used only to describe something extraordinary—"It was located by an agent of mine in Paraguay."

Sedberry put his drink on the marble-topped coffee table, lest the glass slip from his trembling hands. "You can't mean... not 'The Conspirators'?"

Sturdivant nodded, permitting himself the luxury of an enthusiastic gesture. "Actually, I've had it for several weeks, but the original print was quite fragile and there was considerable restoration work to be done before it could be viewed. Namely, what you'll be seeing today is a video copy. And naturally, too, there was considerable expense involved in the restoration, not to mention the procurement itself. A number of cash payments to various Paraguayan officials, for instance."

"Yes, yes, I understand. I told you price was never an object with me."

Quite. Sturdivant took a piece of folded print-out paper from his coat pocket and handed it to Sedberry with a discreet clearing of his throat. Sedberry tried to keep his face immobile as he read the figures, but his eyebrows betrayed him. "This is a great deal of money."

"I have other clients, Mr. Sedberry, who would gladly pay twice that amount for a chance to experience this material."

Swallowing hard, Sedberry opened his briefcase and counted out a stack of unmarked envelopes, each filled with cash. "Count it if you like," he said, tossing the money to Sturdivant with a nonchalance he did not feel.

"Our relationship has always been one of mutual trust, Mr. Sedberry. It's not necessary for me to count the contents." Sturdivant placed the envelopes in a large safe. "Can I offer you another drink, or shall we proceed to the main order of business?"

"Let's not waste any more time."

Sedberry knew it was going to take some fancy financial footwork to cover this expenditure. He had stretched his financial resources very thin in order to construct his rural fiefdom, and just at the point of maximum commitment, he had begun to sense a sea-change in the national mood, slight but significant signs that the gray days of his ministry were becoming history. The nation as a whole had stopped its march to the right; the administration whose agenda and more had created a fertile nation-ally setting for men such as Billy Wayne Sedberry had suffered a serious, sudden decline in popularity. There was talk not only of lame ducks, but of dead ones, too. If the pendulum had not yet begun to swing in the opposite direction—if there was still a grace period, a window, during which he could regain his financial stability—it was clearly poised in the brief space of equilibrium that preceded a new direction.

Wetter demographics had stopped growing six months ago and were starting to sag just a little bit—the audience for his brand of phosporo-d-oxalogenism had grown not only finite but exhaustive as well. Only the

bigger, slicker, capital-heavy ministries were still making a go of it—and as the size of the total pie began to dwindle, the knives being used to slice it had grown sharp indeed. There had been some noise in-flight among the brethren, and surely there would be more, and bloodier, to come. The lesser figures in the business—the real Bible-whacking hicks in polyester suits who ran their operations from local studio sets that looked to have been furnished from a yard sale in a mobile home park—had been windowed-out, tragically, he knew, of the dozen who were back, permanently, on the crucifixion circuit in the boardrooms. Sedberry had been there—he remembered the mangled snarl of tobacco juice, sawdust and unwashed farmers'—and he had no intention of ever going back. There were parcels of land, on the fringe of his development, that he could sell to some connoisseurs, it would take some fudging to pull it off, but that's what he paid his accountants for. He'd just have to cut some more corners somewhere. Use canned music instead of live bands on the TV show, things like that.

Meanwhile, this was too important to pass up. His heart was hammering as he followed Sturdivant into the elevator that led down to the theatre.

The elevator ride always reminded him of how clever Sturdivant was at arranging coincidences that were not coincidental. Their second meeting had been on an elevator. Sedberry had been on his way to his hotel room, after a long and ultimately very disturbing day in the committee room on Capitol Hill. Sturdivant had asked, in a suavely ingratiating manner that bypassed both Sedberry's fatigue and his state of mental agitation, if the good reverend could spare a moment of time to discuss a matter that had "come up" during the course of the day's testimony. Intrigued, Sedberry had agreed.

That day had been full of testimony, and Sedberry had had forced to pour much of it. His work as Vice Chairman of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography was nearly done; that day had marked the half-way point in the last week of scheduled testimony. No ministry in America had been more aggressive in the

war on smut than Sedberry's. He had personally led a phalanx of fundamentalists to the state capitol to twist arms on behalf of one of the nation's toughest anti-obscenity laws, legislation which he, far, stood up against every court test the liberals had thrown at it. His prominence in this crusade was national. When the administration had asked him to serve on the committee, he had accepted graciously, figuring that the national media exposure would cancel out any negative effects of being absent from the ministry's helm for eight weeks.

Sedberry's personal sex life was truncated only by sporadic and rather ordinary sins, and even his position was commingled in the sanctuary prison. His marriage was outwardly a model of Christian decorum, but his wife—a juiceless and unimaginative woman even in her prime—had occupied a

...Like a narwhal's horn breaking through ice, a thin steel blade pierced the apex of the young man's collarbone, his mouth twisted in a stuttering rictus, in a bone-snapping paroxysm of pleasure/pain....

separate bedroom for the last eleven years. When glandular pressures built up to an intolerable degree, Sedberry disgusted himself and sought the company of prostitutes. The experiences served a dual purpose for him; on the one hand, the pressure was relieved, and on the other, the disgust he felt was usually so intense that no new pressures began building for months afterwards. He returned from these periodic lapses with his self-portmuging zeal renewed and with a gleaming rhetorical edge to his sermons and prayers. There were other men in his line of work—he could name fifteen at least—who fell from grace more often and much more evilly.

As a veteran anti-obscenity crusader, Sedberry had already seen most of what that genre had to offer. As the Commission sat for longer and longer hours, its focus growing dimmer, and its morale suffering from the stale condescension of the liberal

press, he had started to grow weary of the endless parade of dildos, rubber corsets, and hypertrophic organs. By this point in the hearings' final week, both revisionism and titillation had been replaced by numbingness. On that day, as they were entering the committee chamber, the Chairperson—a Congressman from a conservative enclave in the Midwest—had jokingly slapped Sedberry on the shoulder and remarked: "Well, today's the day we investigate the UFOs of pornography."

"I don't think I follow you...." Sedberry had mumbled, daily agencies having grown rather vague in his mind.

"Shift movies. They're called the UFOs of porn because everybody's heard about them, but nobody can come up with an authentic specimen of one."

The day's exhibits were introduced and commented upon by a brillo-haired radical feminist who used the occasion to launch into an ideological tirade filled with references to such things as "phalloscentric power prerogatives" and "the tyranny of anatomical accident." As he began to nod off, Sedberry heard the Chairperson whisper *sotto voce*, "How the hell can one have anatomically correct politics?"

At some point during the donning reaction, the exhibits were projected. First came some lurid *grand guignol* scenes from movies of the *Bloodsucking Freaks* ilk—nothing new there—and after that a grainy stretch of film, ostensibly from Thailand, that purported to show a genuine snuff scene but was so riddled with bad splices that no coherent idea of its contents could be formed. Then came something else, something else entirely. It was in clear focus, well-lit, in waxy-hued video color, a lithe, muscular young man, androgynously beautiful, with creamy olive skin and clear black third-world eyes, chained, spread-eagled, against a wall of black veined marble. The lustre of the stone framed the color of his skin to perfection. In front of him, kneeling with her back to the camera, was a swelle blonde woman, from her motions, and from the expressions on the young man's face, it was clear what was going on. Heavy breathing

and moist rhythmic noises from the soundtrack caused the ideologue's whine to fade from hearing. Obviously, the young man's sexual crisis was imminent. As his contortions became more rhythmic and his groans louder, the camera smoothly panned in until only the head and upper torso, glowing faintly with an even torso of penetration, were visible. The young man took a deep breath and opened his mouth to bellow his pleasure. At that exact instant, like a navy's horn blowing through ice, a thin steel blade pierced the apex of his collarbone. The expression on the young man's face underwent a profound change: caught on the wave of his climax, he seemed at first wracked with pleasure, then he registered the agony of penetration; the two sensations blended, a hundred violent emotions flashed across the sculpted planes of his face, his mouth twisted in a stuttering rictus, spewing gruff noises of brute emotion, his deep pooled eyes flashed like pinwheels as he finished, in a bone-snapping paroxysm of pleasure/pain, then sinking slowly to glass-over and lose sensation.

Sedberry realized he had clutched the table, white-knuckled. He was grateful that the low level of lighting prevented anyone from observing that he had an erection fit to beat down a door. He felt his throat turn sandpaper, felt sweat pooling in the valleys of his lap. Nothing he had seen in any of the exhibits had evoked in him a tangible erotic response. Disgust, surprise, even at times a kind of shameful amusement, all these things, yes. But now, confronted with the actual moment of death conjoined in physical union with the moment of supreme physical ecstasy—a spectacle that should have turned his stomach, whether real or staged—he found himself on the trembling verge of a spontaneous emission. Stunned, he turned his eyes away and began to breathe deeply. By the time the lights came on again, only the greasy dissociation of his face betrayed the state of his emotions. And only one person in the room—Sturdivant—had correctly interpreted it. That night, in the hotel room, Sedberry learned what that interpretation meant.

It was true, Sturdivant had begun by say-

ing, that every man had a price and every man had a vice; more precisely, an image or an object or a situation which instantly triggers an erotic response too powerful to be ignored or resisted. Sedberry knew it was useless to pretend he did not know what Sturdivant was talking about him. He knew. And that first night, patiently, in the kindliest manner possible, he explained:

"Thankopsis, he called them—persons for whom the instant of death held a powerful erotic lure. The condition was more common than you might suppose, he assured Sedberry, among persons of power and wealth: generals, executives, political leaders whose decisions sometimes had life or death consequences. An erotic taste, to be sure, and necessarily a secretive one, but not something that would jump its practitioners in the same slinking catlike way that those pathetic wretches who stuffed soiled panties, worshipped exotic footwear, or begged to be unmade-up. On the contrary, the cultural and spiritual pedigree of this particular fetish was quite distinguished. What, traditionally, were the two great subjects of art and literature? Love and death. The kinship between orgasm and death had long been a respectable literary conceit: the Greeks had written about it, so had the Romans, and the Elizabethans had gone so far as to describe the sexual climax as "The Little Death." Really, when you looked back at the history of western culture, it was in no way strange that, for certain individuals whose sensibilities were attuned to it, the kinship between those two states-of-being should be both deep and inextricable.

The incidence of this particular sexual obsession, Sturdivant continued, had risen steadily as the twentieth century had progressed. Violent death, after all, was one of our century's most salient facts. And technology had made the very instant of death an observable, repeatable phenomenon. At that point, Sturdivant had even waxed a bit philosophical: "With still cameras, only a thin discontinuous slice of the experience could be captured—the process itself remained elusive to the photographer. It was like trying to obtain the value of π on your

calculator—you can carry it out to more and more decimal places and get closer and closer to the essence without ever pinning it down precisely. The exact microsecond of transition between life and death remained, as always, one of God's impermeable mysteries. With motion pictures, and now with video tape, it becomes possible to record the entire phenomenological event, even to slow it down, to warp the ingredient time, to stretch it out as it were, to make it repeatable, to make its finest nuances visible so that they could be studied. Even savored. For my clients, these thanatopoietic experiences transcended sex. Of course, sexual release is a part of it, just as it is a part of life itself, but the full spectrum of emotions which can be conjured, amplified, refined, and released, by means of my presentations parake of the mingled essences of life and death. They are designed to provoke not merely a physical spasm, but a total, consummate, soul-and-body catharsis."

He, Sturdivant, was a specialist, a dedicated broker between these rare and illicit phenomena and a select number of individuals—men and even a few women, he hinted, who were mature enough, sophisticated enough, to appreciate the quality, thoroughness, and subtle attention to detail which characterized his services. Naturally, such services bore a price tag commensurate with their esoteric nature, but absolute discretion was included in the price. Nothing would kill his business faster than indiscretion, and Sturdivant was first and foremost a businessman. If *WMF Sedberry*—the "Reverend" had already been discarded—would care to join him tomorrow night, the first experience would be, so to speak, on the house; he proffered a card with the Georgetown address on it. The event would be the only slightest taste of the refinements, the truly exquisite nuances, that could be opened up for Sedberry in the future, should their relationship flourish.

The show stopped and its doors opened silently. Sedberry followed the host down a short corridor, then through the unmarked door that led to the theatre. The door could be locked from inside—one more assurance of privacy. "Please go in and take your seat. The presentation will last approximately

eighty minutes," Sturdivant bowed and closed the door. Once inside, Sedberry took his favorite seat: a comfortable, contoured chair with outized armrests. There were other seats behind and on either side of this one, but they were Sturdivant's and covered with cloth. Sturdivant had once intimates that there were group auditions, sometimes, but beyond that he would not elaborate. He was, as advertised, the very embodiment of discretion.

And, as Sturdivant had predicted, their relationship had flourished. The first few times Sedberry had come to Washington, the "presentations" had been videos of the sort he had seen that day in the committee hearings—though skillful and vividly done, there was nothing to prove their authenticity. At first, that hardly mattered, so powerful had their initial effect been on Sedberry. Each presentation was carefully structured; great care was taken in such matters as comfort and privacy. Sturdivant's attention to erotic detail was equally artistic and equally discreet; at some point during each "thanatopsis," a tall, pale, dark-haired woman with full-lipped sensual features would slowly materialize from the darkness close to Sedberry's seat. He never saw how she entered the room; perhaps she was a ghost. As his own excitement mounted, she would minister to him with hand or mouth, never watching the screen, only Sedberry's eyes; her timing was always perfect and her manipulations always added a delicious *jeon* of sensuality to what was already an experience of shocking intensity. Her fingers were incredibly adept at tracing the flicker of nerve-end currents; her mouth was always cool at the start, then it seemed to take heat from him and pass it back, refined and sweetened, in a perfect loop. She never spoke a word, never betrayed a single vulgar symptom of subjective emotion. She could have been any woman, or every woman, or for that matter, a disembodied succubus. Her first appearance had been disconcerting, but—as Sturdivant had predicted when Sedberry brought the matter up—she soon became an insparable part of the entire ritual. Sturdivant refused to divulge her name; Sedberry, privately, came to think of her as

the Dark Angel.

Around him, the theater darkened. From hidden speakers came the sound of Wagner—the ceremonial grandeur of *Parsifal*. The screen filled with light; Sedberry could now see his own lower body, a small oblong of floor around his seat—otherwise the room had become inconspicuous. Like Death itself, it turned into a realm outside of space and time. The sensation of being wired into the images was hypnotic. In his own way, Sturdivant was an artist.

Now there were men on the screen: stern, Prussian visages, Ion Crosses glimmering at their throats, their uniformed breasts aglow with badges and ribbons. Jealous warriors. Aristocrats. As Sedberry studied and became familiar with their faces, the narrator's voice began to override the music: raw, Wellesian, intimate yet authoritative, sonorous and ingratiating—a voice in a thousand. Sedberry wondered—very briefly, for the mood of the ritual was coming over him now like a cloud of incense—if this narrator had any idea what his scripts were used for.

"Look into the eyes of these men, these cultured, virile faces. These are the men who tried to assassinate Adolf Hitler. These are men who, but for an accident, would have changed the history of the world."

After Sedberry's fourth trip to Washington—the visits were now monthly—his host had introduced him to a more subtle and sophisticated level of experience; not to mention a geometrical increase in his fee. Sedberry was not unimpressed; for Sturdivant had mentioned "the next level" several times in their post-presentation discussions, over brandy, in the living room. These sessions, he was told, were necessary to avoid any shock. Sedberry might feel in going straight from the theater into the streets, a transition that could lead, in Sturdivant's words, to a "case of the psychobical heads."

The thanatopic experience could be enhanced a hundredfold, he said, by being particularized. Just as conventional sex was, as a rule, deeper and more rewarding if shared with a partner one knew intimately, so was the contemplation of Death made

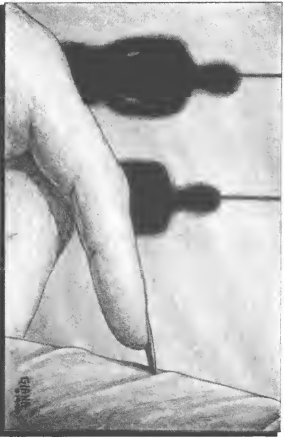
richer, subtler, more intense, if a mood of intimacy could be established with the victim.

Certain promises Sturdivant assured him, it was possible. Sturdivant assured him, to "know" the subject in something very close to the Biblical sense—if the presentations were handled with sufficient sensitivity. The promise of even greater erotic release lured Sedberry into agreement, although he confessed to Sturdivant that he did not fully grasp the concepts they had been discussing. "Nothing less than understanding more than experience," Sturdivant had promised. "I'll select your first partner very carefully."

That was how Sedberry had learned that certain deaths carry greater resonance, a

aesthetic responses he had not known he possessed.

Certain memories from that time stood out, even now, as pinnacles of experience. There had been the profound experience of confronting the death, by garrot, at the hands of Franco's torturers, of the left-wing Spanish poet Luis de Rovira. The event had been filmed in the whitewashed chambers of a political jail in Salamanca, in the summer of 1938. The components of the presentation had been put together with a high degree of skill, particularly the editing. Montages of de Rovira's home landscape—sun-baked hillsides, dusty village lanes



higher content of music, than others. A video tape of a wine-soaked devillet expiring after being struck by a truck contained no mystery, no subtlety, no significance. It might provide a quick crude fix, nothing more. But the carefully observed death of a great artist, a historical figure, an individual of power and importance—from sharing these experiences, the witness gained not only release, but a portion of wisdom; to use a crude analogy, it was like the difference between spending ten solid minutes with a common streetwalker and spending a long, slow night with an expensive courtesan. Over a period of a year, Sturdivant developed in Sedberry a set of

with timeless Andalusian faces passing through the bright vibrant air—had altered with newness and still-montages of the poet's career. Within the space of an hour, Sedberry learned a great deal about modern Spanish literature, more surprisingly, he learned to care for the verses of this doomed idealist. The unseen narrator read specimens of de Rovira's work throughout the presentation. At the climax—both the film's and Sedberry's—as the camera panned in for a close-up of the poet's face, eyes bulging, the cords of his neck like sweat-dripped cables, the narrator had passionately declaimed de Rovira's final lines, written on the endpapers of a prison Bible

on the morning of his execution:

*How can a voice stop time?
From within the windows of pain
They emboldened my darkness
Until my cries, like harshest
ecstasies, tore apart the
Heavy, unpermeated silence.*

*What is left of my art is this:
to burn up coldly
that it might exist.*

At the final sonorous lines, rolling like thunder on the narrator's Churchillian tones, Franco's hooded artisans—who had prolonged the garroting, on Franco's direct orders, for nearly twenty minutes—gave the screws a final twist. The writers' corpse shot out of his mouth, riding a crest of foam like a foundering surfboard, and as he soundlessly screamed, the Dark Angel intensified her carresses so that Billy Wayne Sedberry's poems seemed to mingle with those of the dying poet and for one transcendent instant he drew power, beauty, and spiritual nourishment from the giving up of that majestic poet's essence.

Two months later, Sturdivant had pushed the frontiers of Sedberry's expertise still further, by showing him a grainy, clandestine film of the execution, by guilotine, of an exquisitely beautiful Algerian girl named Djamila Ahkror, convicted of a series of bloody terrorist bombings in 1960.

She had been thoroughly and professionally interrogated, of course, but the presentation laudably avoided dwelling on the sordid business with electrodes and tubs of ice water. Instead, it limned, by means of quick, almost subliminal frames—grainy, dark, as though the pictures had been taken under sediment-laden water—all the sheer desperation of beauty. In counterpoint, the camera roamed slowly and poetically over the anatomy of a young woman who was either Djamila herself or a double close enough to be her twin. The narrator, without claiming authenticity for this foot-
step, spoke the words of the fact that Djamila had been a prostitute and a star of pornographic movies, up until she achieved ideological salvation in her seventeenth year. It was possible, just possible, that these films were authentic. The whole montage was as radiant of sweet adolescent sexual-

ity as David Hamilton photo-spread, and it made Sedberry ache for a kind of ravishing sexual innocence that he had never experienced.

Then, with a bracing, shocking suddenness, the presentation moved on to a surgically dispassionate discussion of the guillotine accompanied by shots of Djamila being bound by fierce crewcut paratroopers in camouflaged fatigues, their eyes hidden by mirrored sunglasses. Her innocent face was transfigured by terror, while the narrator moved on to a cold exposition of the unanswerable "Guillotine Question."

"Does the head continue to live, even for a millisecond, after the blade has fallen? Dozens of eyewitnesses from the time of the French Revolution described heads that would not lie still in the basket; eyes that blinked, mouths that formed words or sought to voice a soundless scream. Medically speaking, the continuation of consciousness after the trunk has been severed seems a dubious proposition, but no one can know for certain. In this case, the commandant of the prison had made a bet with his chief torturer—that is why the execution of Djamila Ahkror was filmed in slow motion..."

Never removing her cold, Olympian gaze from his own eyes, gauging her emotions and pressures and fictions entirely through the feedback loop she had created with Sedberry's nervous system, the Dark Angel brought him to an agonizing peak and then contrived to hold him there while the blade fell, hold him yet another second while the head came into focus, lying aslant on a concrete pedestal. Clearly, whether directed by conscious will or muscular reflex, the girl's fall and succulent lips did move, seeming to form a word. As blood flowed over them and her enormous dark eyes grew opaque (that filmed slowly, so slowly, an eternity of seconds), the Dark Angel made one additional surgically precise motion and Sedberry exploded. It seemed, for a hallucinatory moment, as though he poured his seed in that blood-hot and vulnerable mouth upon the screen. This experience had so shaken him, so taken him into an area of human experience which had no name and no possible

section from God or man, that Sedberry had stopped his trips to Washington for two months.

He returned, of course, as Sturdivant had known he would. Yielding fully to his obsession, he gorged himself on Death, and in turn he sought to choke Death with the floods of his own vitality. In the ensuing months he witnessed an astonishing array of expirations: movie stars, authors, statesmen, a couple of rock stars—all their deaths passed before his eyes, all interwoven with his flesh, even as they abandoned their own.

Now the screen showed a brutal montage of Hitler's march of conquest, Patton after nation fell before the blade of his panzers; race after race went into the boxcars, into the showers, up the hideous chimneys belching oily clouds of smoke into the Polish sky; Jews, Poles, Slavs, Gypsies. In the counterpoint, the narrator outlined the growth of the anti-Hitler conspiracy, building up an impression of collective nobility and dedication. The officers who risked everything on the plot were sketched in such telling strokes that Sedberry came to know them, and to tremble for their fate.

He had once asked Sturdivant: how did there come to be so many films? Sturdivant had shrugged his chin, self-referential smile and smiled. "The subject is one of infinite interest. And the services I perform are important to a greater number of people than you can perhaps imagine. Naturally, where a demand exists, it is the broker's duty to obtain the product. I have spent years and several fortunes creating the network that makes it all go." For the first time in their relationship, Sedberry had heard a genuine glow of emotion in Sturdivant's tones—was it pride?—and it occurred to him that Sturdivant might well be a greater perverser than any of his customers.

One evening, in an unusually expansive mood, Sturdivant had let drop a mention of what he called the "Holy Grail" of snuff-movies: the prolonged execution of the men who tried to assassinate Adolf Hitler.

"Hitler himself ordered the manner of their deaths. 'Hang them like so many cats,' he said. And he ordered that the whole deaths be filmed in every detail. He watched the films over and over again in a private

projection room, witnesses who stood outside the door could hear him laughing and shouting. One evening he invited Hitler in—in order, him, I suppose—to watch with him, but Hitlermer couldn't take it. He left the room and threw up in a potted plant. Oh, those films are legendary, they truly are. Also, almost every account of them indicates that the films themselves were destroyed during the final days of the Third Reich. If they ever found their way into a private collection, I am sure my agents would have located them by now. There are several connoisseurs who have offered very substantial amounts for the conspirator films. A businessman with my reputation hates to come up empty-handed. But...."

Sturdivant shrugged.

They had enjoyed terrible luck, those conspirators. Explosive devices that failed, sudden changes in the Führer's itinerary which con-

...Each man was suspended just off the ground, so that his toes might obtain just enough fleeting purchase to alleviate his death-agonies a few seconds at a time....

found the most elaborate plans, assassins whose nerve failed at the last minute—all of it culminating in the heroic and almost successful attempt by the one-armed hero Count Stauffenberg. On the screen were reversed shots of the shattered conference room, then pictures of an adon-faced Hitler pouring the salt-smoking rubble with a baggy and obviously distraught Viscount begging behind him like a forlorn but obedient bulldog.

The conspirators' trial, a shameless publicity spectacle, was now highlighted with a series of shots whose editing gave an effect of momentum, of quivering toward the climax: from the thick shadows at the edge of the theater, the Dark Angel drifted into his peripheral vision. Tall, gaunt, as though carved from warm marble, salt-knit and touched him, so very knowingly, with the razor-edged nail of one long tapering finger. A shudder of excitement coursed through

him. The build-up was already extraordinarily strong; the sense of historical tragedy, of overwhelming cultural and metaphysical resonance, that was communicated to him from this tragic story, had shaken open the deepest conduits of his flesh, opened the valves to every reservoir of feeling within him.

The Dark Angel's carresses took on new urgency as the condemned men were shown being led to a Gestapo basement. Hitler had ordered the method of their deaths, as well as his meticulous and rhetorically thorough documentation: each man was to be suspended just off the ground, so that his toes might obtain just enough fleeting purchase to alleviate his death agonies for a few seconds at a time, by nooses of wire attached to meathooks in the ceiling. The meathooks, the narrator informed Sedberry, had been obtained from a real slaughterhouse. After a longtime of course, exhaustion would take its toll and the dangling men would slowly struggle to death.

Close ups of the faces: Field Marshal von Witzleben, Generalis Haepner, Steff, von Hase, and the handsome young Count van Warneburg. Stripped to the waist, hands bound tightly behind them. Once hoisted on their hip-tees, their belts were unfastened so that their struggles and kicks might gradually cause their pants to drop—a humiliating touch that also came straight from a Fuhrer directive.

What was it Sturdivant had told him about the erotic reflex of asphyxiation? Surely it had been true, for each of the hanging men, as their trousers slipped pathetically over their writhing hips and shuddering buttocks, was revealed to be tannish, more engorged with nance and baroque, more overindulgently catholic, than anything Sturdivant had ever provided for him before. Moving fluidly from his side to the floor between his trembling knees, the Dark Angel matched his crescendo of excitement with the virtuoso workings of her unsparing mouth. Sedberry was near to fainting with excitement as the men on the screen—all those field marshals and counts and generals stiff

with Prussian rectitude—danced a wild bucking tarantella, their toes bloodily from scabbling against the concrete, their faces disoriented and engorged, their manhoods flopping and stabbing the air.

Sedberry gathered wind for a bellow; he was about to come like a prize bull, from every confluence of his system. On the drawn-out cusp that led to the precipice, however, he observed something unusual, disturbing, behind the images on the screen, dimly visible now that he eyes had grown used to the flickering darkness, he could see the outline of two tripods. Just as he realized it was too late to stop his own climax—the event was roaring down the tracks like a four-mile freight crossing Kansas—he also realized that spotlights were coming up on the spot where he sat.

Then he saw the video cameras atop the tripods and he knew they were recording every particle of this experience. From inside his chair came the tense click of spring-loaded blades being cocked. Steel bands snapped around his wrists and ankles as the Dark Angel countered his convulsion of fear with irresistible powerful livings of her own. Understanding exploded in his skull just as his body, unable to retreat from the Dark Angel's skills, began its eruption. Before the intensity of mingled sensations forced him to close his eyes, he looked down at her. For the first time, she was smiling.

No long afterward, an unmarked tow truck, removed the nondescript rental car. Mr. Sturdivant carefully placed his new video tape in the vault where he stored his merchandise. Then he poured himself a brandy and looked up a long distance number on his rolodex. There was a television evangelist in Tennessee who had been on a very special waiting list for some months, and Sturdivant, good businessman that he was, always tried to deliver the goods.



Festival of Stigma Martyrs

When I was a child

Forced to attend church

I would stare at the adults

Waiting with open mouths

To eat flesh and drink blood

Of a body (I was told) that

Died two thousand years ago

In a far away place.

Now, I watch television:

In the Middle East

Mounds of bodies pile up

Around holy warriors.

White hooded Americans

Raise burning crosses high

Laughing at their head-shaven children

Marching in black soldier boots

Saluting long dead German leaders.

And the Pope continues resting

Waiting for another parade and

The crowd that will gather

To receive communion.

—Chad Henley



You may have seen the name of James Robert Smith around the small press on occasion, but to see some of Mr. Smith's most horrific work, you might want to look into the comic books. Not in *SPIDERMAN* or *THE INCREDIBLE HULK*, but in his longer titles like *ASYLUM*, *TAROO*, and *Epics: HELLRaiser*. Mr. Smith, who goes by Bob, as opposed to Jim, or Jim Bob, or even "Hey, you," has contributed a number of fine pieces to *DEATHREALM*, as well as to *NEW BLOOD*, *EDLDRITCH TAILS*, and the anthology *SCARE CAKE*.

DEATHREALM: You appear to be quite versatile as a writer. In *DEATHREALM*, you've had a very traditional piece that relies on atmosphere and subtle plotting to engage the reader (Parched), as well as a supernatural tale (The Call) that you originally wrote with intent to "out-Lovecraft Lovecraft." On the other hand, you've composed a Clive Barker pastiche for the *Epics Comics' HELLRaiser* series, and your story in *TAROO* (We) went so far as to be called "offensively sexist" by Ellen Datlow. What is your favorite type of dark fiction—as a writer—and where do you see yourself going in the field?

SMITH: My favorite type of "dark fiction" is the type of stories that are set in the modern world. I think that if the reader is to feel any true emotion during the reading, then the tale must be firmly rooted in real, contemporary settings. The most effective horror stories are the ones dealing with people and their surroundings as they are now; you have to touch the person reading your yarns, and writing about the world they experience each day makes the dark fantasy portion of the work all the more convincing. It's the truest way I know to evoke a shiver (but not the only way).

As for where I'm going in the field, of course my goal is to do work that is good enough to achieve some sort of critical recognition. The best way to do that is to be innovative, and that's also the most difficult thing in the world to do. Failing that, one has to do work that is unique, if not in content, then in style. The step below that is mere competence, about where I think I am now and a couple of categories beneath where I wish to be. For a long time I moped about, whining that I couldn't write like so-and-so and such-and-such, but I finally fought through that and now I'm just trying to develop my own "voice."

DEATHREALM: I expect your writing background is pretty firmly entrenched in literary fiction. How is it different to compose a story for the comics as compared to straightforward prose? Do you have to consciously change your mental gears in order to write for a primarily visual medium?

SMITH: As a matter of fact, I grew up reading lots of comics. My dad owned several used books stores back in the 60's, and he bought comics in such huge numbers that he had to rent a large warehouse to store them, and the overflow from that filled our living room. I read more comics than any kid who has ever lived. So, beyond the books my parents encouraged me to read, I also consumed vast numbers of comics, so I come by my comic scripting pretty honestly.

When I'm constructing a script from one of my prose stories, it's not that much different from the actual story construction. However, when I'm making a pitch to an editor for a story written purely for the medium, then I have to write short (500 to

600 words) synopses that are heavy on visual imagery while cramming in as much plot as possible when those words are competing for elbow room with colors and textures and smells; heavy characterization is virtually unheard of in a comic synopsis. The plot's the thing. So, yeah, you do have to change gears a bit when doing that kind of work.

DEATHREALM: How much time do you ordinarily spend on a story for, say, *HELLRAISER*, from the conception of the idea to its final scripting? How about a prose story of comparable complexity?

SMITH: My *HELLRAISER* yarns usually take me anywhere from twenty seconds to thirty minutes to hash out. The actual construction of the script is something else. Those are fifteen page affairs (illustrated), and it generally takes me two to three hours to do a good job on one, although I am getting faster at producing them.

When I'm writing a prose story, I generally take a week or longer to complete it, regardless of the final length (short shorts excepted). I am not a fast writer, when it comes to prose, since I plot heavily and do exorbitant outlines. I also go heavy on the polishing, these days (wordprocessor, don't you know).

DEATHREALM: How do professional comic markets compare to pro fiction markets, as far as difficulty in placing your work?

SMITH: Since I've only placed a couple of stories in what are defined as "pro" markets, and have sold well over a hundred pages of comic script, I'd like to say that the comic market is easier to crack. But it isn't. Unfortunately, the current practice in the comics industry is a form of professional nepotism, in which the editors in charge of buying for their specific titles are passing on the scripting chores to other editors, who are friends. (I know this must sound like sour grapes, but many of the industry's professionals will back me up on this.) It's not impossible to break me, but it's damned difficult. You have to locate an editor who is willing to look at work not done by the guy who works one office down from him, an author who can't give him a scripting job on another title. I don't feel I run into this problem when trying to place a short story.

Yes, it's hard, but at least I know I'm facing an impartial reader.

DEATHREALM: What about pay rates—do comics pay more per gallon of brain sweat?

SMITH: Comics are far and away superior to the short story market. It's a sad fact that no one can make a living in the post-pulp times writing short stories; the days of Bob Howard are long gone. The most I've been paid for a prose story is seven cents a word. I have been paid, counting royalties, roughly \$2,000 for a single fifteen page story in the comics industry and I know writers who make more than a hundred grand per year writing for comics.

However, the down side is that when you're not dealing with the "big two" (Marvel and DC), you are taking risks. Some of the slickest human beings on this planet are involved in publishing comics in the alternative market (non-Marvel/DC); a lot of these people don't mind telling you lies. I've done work for which I've never been paid, and that is something I won't repeat. I learned my lesson about contracts, and I will never again do work that is not payment-on-acceptance, unless that work is self-published. If you are planning on working with a small publisher, my advice would be to ask as many comics professionals as possible what that publisher's reputation is.

DEATHREALM: I know you've written a novel or two that you're trying to sell—how's it going? Do you have long range plans to be a professional novelist?

SMITH: My goal has always been to be a novelist, which I reckon I am despite no publishing credits there—an unpublished novelist. Although I do comics work, my biggest kick is writing prose, and I most enjoy writing when I'm working on a novel. In addition to that, the only way to realistically make a living as a writer of fiction is to do it selling novels. I'm now at the mercy of my second agent, and I'll be a waiting game after you finish the novel. Pretty frustrating business, this; not something for a naïf here.

DEATHREALM: What is your aim in your fiction writing—both in your prose and in your comic work?

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TIAMAT #4 • Jared Walters, 12905 West 20th Ave., Golden, CO 80401 • 8" x 8" • 18 pages • \$12.00 for 4 issues/1 year.

I'M NOT SURE if **TIAMAT** can properly be called a "magazine"—it's more like a newsletter, with its square page format, short number of pages, and focus on reviews of current attractions. The text is typewritten and reduced to fit two columns per page, which makes reading it something of a chore if you don't have 20/20 vision.

The reviews are divided into categories: Books, Magazines, Film, Video, and Art, plus two pieces of fiction. The issue's featured artist is Chris Friend.

The reviews are written, I assume, by editor Jared Walters. While not exactly professionally composed, the reviews reach a level of competence that enthralls. I tend to prefer a somewhat cooler tone, such as that of Stefan Dziemianowicz or Gary Branchek, as opposed to the very colloquial style Walters employs. His review of Henry *Portrait of a Serial Killer* gives me enough information to want to see the film—almost too much; his *Robocop II* review, while not overwhelmingly negative, presents the usual anti-sequal sentiment that is a little too trendy among reviewers.

I have to disapprove very strongly of the choices of fiction in this issue. I found the tales by Bonnie Gravy-snake (how much you wanna bet this is Walters himself?) and Roger Anderson, both very amateurish and silly, even though Gravy-snake's *An Unsuccessful Cat* contained some of the same hints

of humor that color Walters' reviews. My preference would be to see the entire magazine devoted to reviews and whatever news items Mr. Walters might have at his disposal. I'm not impressed by Mr. Friend's art. I'm sorry to say. While he shows a certain finesse in the treatment of his evil faces (which is apparently all he draws), the backgrounds are all scribbles, completely lacking in style. I'm not the world's best artist, or art critic, but I have a good grasp of what I like, and this isn't it. My apologies to the artist.

TIAMAT, as a product, certainly has its place. Innovative? I wouldn't go that far, but if you enjoy conversational reviews with a touch of crudity, you'll probably enjoy it.



FIGMENT #4 • J.C. Hendee, PO Box 3566, Moscow, ID 83843-0477 • 5 1/2" x 8 1/2" • 48 pages • \$4.00 per copy/\$14.50 for 4 issues/1 year.

I HAVE THE distinct feeling that the editors of **FIGMENT**, J.C. and Barb Hendee, took a good, long look at **DEATHREID** when they put their magazine together. The typewriters are different, and **FIGMENT** is done on a laser printer, but the similarity

of layout and design is a little too striking. Artwork is sparse, mostly line drawings, and the quality is a bit inconsistent. But appearances are pretty much where the similarities end.

The fiction in **FIGMENT**—consisting of six stories—is mostly fantasy and science-fiction oriented, with only a sprinkling of horror here and there. I thoroughly enjoyed Kristine Kathryn Ruscak's *Light Through Mist*, a quaint little fantasy, until the very end, where the good old circular plotting contrivance rears its ugly head. The strengths of Ruscak's writings, at least, make the piece as a whole more than palatable. Michael J. O'Connor's *Oh, Deity*, a sci-fi/fantasy satire, also stimulated my interest, with a much more satisfying ending than Ruscak's piece.

Cathy Bulbrunn gets a little too cute for my tastes with *Reflections of Misery*, about a product for dry skin that goes overboard. I very much enjoyed the atmosphere of Don Horstoski's *Third Dimension Plus*, though I didn't think it as well-written as the bulk of the stories in the issue. In this one, a roving history professor discovers a beautiful tapestry in Florence, Italy, which supposedly belonged to Leonardo Da Vinci. Above and beyond that, the door that features prominently in the tapestry opens...to the unknown. Beware.

Centenary Spells by Brad Mays is a true supernatural horror tale, one with vivid, grotesque imagery. I enjoyed the build-up, and John Borkowski's art gives the piece an extra ounce of staying power. A somewhat absurd ending, but appropriate to the scope of the tale.

I enjoyed the poetry throughout, with the best pieces being contributed by John Gray, Thomas A. Eason, and Ann K. Schneider.

Several features by the editors, letters and reviews round out the issue. **FIGMENT** has a way to go before reaching what I think it is ultimately desires to do—showcase a very balanced, polished mixture of fiction that crosses genres, minus **NEW BLOOD**-type grotesqueries. The editors, who from what I read of them seem a little too modest about their endeavor, do a respectable—commendable—job now. I'd like to see them reach for more original packaging.

AMAZING EXPERIENCES #1 • Jon Hiron, 544 Ypacarai Valley Road #A273, PO Box 880, Walnut Creek, CA 94596 • 8 1/2" x 11" • 44 pages \$4.00 for single issue.

THE FIRST ISSUE of **AMAZING EXPERIENCES**, which calls itself a "magazine" (have they trademarked the term?), immediately strikes one as overpacked at a whopping \$4.00 for an offered package held together by a trio of staples. Mainly, the "magazine" is a showcase for short fiction, both by veteran professionals and novice authors. As such, **AMAZING EXPERIENCES** is of rather uneven quality. Reading this was like hitting the Sawatch range—very high peaks interspersed with very deep dips. There were seven stories in the issue, two by editor-handpicked writers. I was pleased to see Kevin Anderson's *The Old Man and the Cherry Tree*, which originally came out in **GRUE** #3, a bit before my time in the small press. What we have here is a fairly told in almost archaic prose, and set in feudal Japan—the type of story Darrell Schweitzer does well, or which Ray Bradbury once wrote. It's a nice piece of work. Also reprinted here was *Watchdogs* by Robert Silverberg, a bland, uninspired tale that had to have passed muster through author name recognition—very disappointing.

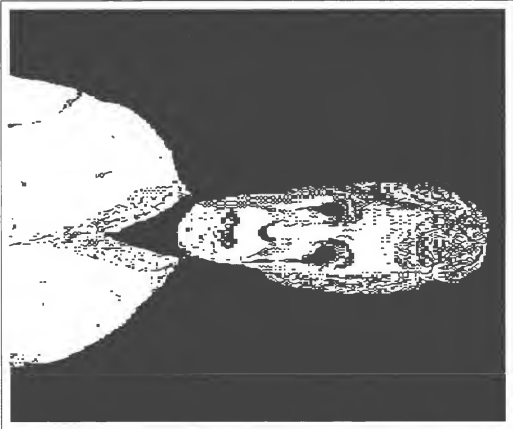
What I found pleasantly surprising here were a couple of pieces by new writers. *Lunatics* by David Sandner was excellently crafted, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. He displayed such skill that I will keep my eyes open for his future work. Another story, *Roberta Debono's snow Wolf* was wonderfully written and flowed with an almost poetic rhythm. If the plot was a measure weak, I hardly noticed for the two young authors who showed great promise.

By contrast, also included in this issue were some truly awful stories typical of small press missteps. Michele L'Arrive's *A Night Alone* should have been left alone, as poorly constructed and executed as anything you're likely to read in the small press. These stories are virtual textbook cases

(Continued on page 56)

FROM MY REFLECTION, DARKLY

BY DAVID NIAL L



IT HAS BEEN hours since I last saw Eric, a lifetime of shattered reality, an age of dissolving foundations—eternity. I know I should go to him, should try to help, but I know also that he would not answer if I called, would not come to the door, were I to knock. I must look horrible, hair unkempt, face scratched from my attempt this morning to shave. I could not use the mi-

rror. Truth begins with proof—a fight it until death forces its own truth upon me, if that is the choice. I cannot bear to know what he knows, to see what he has seen, and they will not look into a mirror.

Eric Blount, student of the arcane, philosopher of dreams, academic genius, was my best friend. I had grown up a quiet, shy boy, uncertain of what I would do with the great

gift of life ahead of me. Eric knew what he wanted. He wanted to go beyond the gift, to see whence it came and to follow it to the source. Life held no contentment for such a man. He inspired me in both awe and an incredulous, half-hero worship that even the ridiculousness of the bulk of his connections failed to stifle. He was incorrigible. It started harmlessly enough, or so it would have seemed. He spent hours alone, pouring over volumes of arcane "wisdom," searching the pages upon pages of words left behind by such luminaries as Eliphas Levi, Alastair Crowley, and Madame Blavatsky. He spent a good three years among the adepts of the modern Rosicrucian Order. That was an amusing period, what with the candles and altars and assorted implements of their rituals. It proved not enough. Though he claimed certain suc-

cesses with these unlikely arts, he was not happy with his progress. "I would be dead twice over before I could discover anything, truly valuable at this rate," he complained one day. He had shown up at my apartment with two aged bottles of Spanish wine, which he knew for my weakness, and launched immediately into a discourse on the futility of his past years' research.

"Why try, then?" I inquired. "It would seem you are left with the choices of enjoying your life in some normal pursuit, or wasting it in search of secrets admittedly beyond your grasp."

To my surprise, he did not take offense at this, only fell into a meditative quiet that made me nervous. When he was most to be avoided. His thoughts too often took Frost's "path less traveled," and just as often I ended up following.

"Consider this," he said at last, pausing to refill our glasses and to order his thoughts. "Suppose that research is not the answer. For argument's sake, what if there are times, places, even activities that bring us

to a nearer point of truth? Rationally aside, for it is the greatest of hindrances in this type of affair, suppose, say, a poet, while writing, is in some sort of rapport with some higher state of existence? Or an artist? Certainly a writer can mold from mere words on paper images that warp reality as we know it, yet make it real for us at the same time."

"Are you saying, then," I asked with a grin, that our reality can be made less real by these arts?"

"Not exactly," he answered. "I am trying to suggest, and I know that this will amuse you, but bear with me, that such creative acts have had a great part in the creation of our reality. I believe that man, given a choice, sees, touches, and believes in what is most convenient or beneficial to man. Were enough people to decide to perceive

"...I have rent the veil, torn it asunder...I have peeked beyond it to that which was hidden...They are watching for me, now...I dare not leave this circle!"

red as yellow, it would be yellow, and all those who still saw red would be issued corrective lenses and labeled as abnormal."

Surely you can't believe this is true of everything?" I exclaimed, certain that I would get the brunt of this argument. "If that were the case, could we not disbelieve the chairs from beneath us and send ourselves crashing to the floor?"

Eric's eyes momentarily shared my amusement, but only momentarily. The light of the hunter on a trail was in them, and I resigned myself to another period of his eccentricity.

We spoke then of other things until the bottles were both dry. Eric then rose, bidding me a good night's sleep, and departed to the shadows of the streets. As he left, he stopped by the large, full-length mirror I kept beside my door. Being particular of my appearance, I had purchased it some years before at an auction. He spoke no word as he gazed at his reflection, but the expression was odd, as though struck for the first time by some peculiarity of his appearance. At the time, I paid this no mind. Since then I have had occasion to dwell upon it in

sharp detail. I wish to God I'd reached out and put my fist through that glittering surface and shattered it then and there, damning the risk to bone and skin.

It was several weeks later that I decided to return Eric's visit. After procuring two bottles of Campo Viejo, 1972, I began the mile or so trek to his flat. I seldom made use, in those days, of public transportation, and the risks of operating a private vehicle on the roadways grew less enticing with each passing headline. Eric felt the same. Our visits invariably began with one of us making the journey across several residential blocks and through the paths of the Municipal Park. The trip was somewhat more uncomfortable on my part, with Eric living as he did among the more run-down tenements, and I hurried my steps upon reaching his side of the park.

The front door to his building hung open, dangling loosely from one hinge. I made my usual mental note to prevail upon him to move out. His reasons for remaining in such seedy surroundings had always remained obscure to me. His indifference as last survivor of a well-to-do family left him simply provided for.

"It's the freedom, Percy," he'd once told me. "No women peering from their window to yours, discussing things that are no business of theirs and drawing attention to where it is not desired. People have respect your privacy, as long as you lock it away tightly enough."

He had indeed succeeded in this. I knocked on the metal reinforced door loudly, nervously glancing every few seconds over my shoulder to the shadows that seemed to shift behind my back whenever I denied them my attention. After a few moments, I heard hurried footsteps within.

"Who is it?" Eric called, not opening at once.

"Percy," I answered, "only Percy, Eric, come to return your visit, and your voice makes me nervous."

There was a clatter of chains, a rattling of bolts and locks, and the door swung wide. I did not enter immediately—my shock would not allow it.

The apparition before me hardly reminded me of my friend at all. He was gaunt, not in the manner of one who is starved, but as though he'd not slept for days—perhaps weeks. His eyes, bloodshot and dark with fatigue, darted about wildly, searching the shadows that had plagued me only moments before. I found my own fears magnified intensely. Pushing Eric aside, I darted into the room, slamming the door behind me.

"My God, man!" I cried. "What is happening here? You look half-dead, not to mention delirious. You've even gotten me nervous."

"Come," he replied, "to the den."

I followed, depositing the wine bottles on a table in passing and making a vain attempt to straighten my now disheveled appearance. I made to go into the mirror in the hall, but to my consternation, it was covered with a cloth of deepest jet.

I moved to pull it aside, and Eric leapt, his shaking hands clutched like talons, and grasped my arm with surprising strength. My hand stopped inches from the dark cloth covering the mirror.

"What?" I stammered, backing away and pulling my arm free. "What in hell are you doing? I only wanted to comb my hair! Why in blazes is the damnable thing covered, anyway?"

"Not yet," he hissed, tugging on my arm. "First come to the den, it is safe there."

By this time I was beginning to seriously fear for my friend's mental state. I had seen him act in peculiar fashion on many occasions, but never to the point of inducing discomfort upon himself. It was unnatural, and it made me not a little nervous to be alone with him in such condition.

With a longing glance at the mirror, I allowed him to lead me through the beaded curtains that closed off his "sanctum sanctorum" from the more mundane parts of his home.

This room had never failed to invite my curiosity, even my awe. I supposed, in the intricately piled and jumbled displays of occult bric-a-brac it offered, the shelves piled with dusty ancient volumes, and walls hidden behind brightly colored tapestries. It was truly impressive, or had been so on

my last visit.

Now it was filled with clutter along with the walls. The furniture, even the rug, lay piled in corners, dragged as far as possible from the room's center. A brazer stood, small wisps of incense smoke wafting cell.

Ingrained from his coils, marking the very center of the floor. Around it was drawn a circle in white, perhaps six feet in circumference. Concentrically, a larger circle, seemingly burnt into the wooden floor surrounded this. From the outer edge of the larger circle, the points of a pentagon shot outward toward the walls of the room. Strange symbols lined the space between the circles. With a final entreating glance to be certain I'd followed, Eric leapt over the symbols to land, breathing in ragged gulps within the center ring.

"Come on, man, for God's sake!" he cried. "I promise I'll tell you everything, but you've got to get within the circle!" Seeing no alternative but blind flight, I succumbed to his wishes, walking slowly into the circle.

"No!" he cried, as my foot scraped accidentally across one of the symbols. Scrambling about on his hands and knees, he feverishly repaired the damage with a piece of charcoal from beneath the brazer. Sweating profusely, he turned to face me, slinking to the floor.

"I know how this must look," he finally gasped. Silently, I believed he did not, but I listened as he went on. "Believe me, if I could find a way to stop it, I would. There is no way out now, I have seen too much."

"What have you seen?" I asked, seeing my myself opposite him on the floor. "You look to be half-dead, man. When was the last time you slept?" "Sleep?" His eyes



grew vague, as though considering it himself for the first time. "What day is this?" "You must be joking!" I exclaimed. "It is the 16th, of course, but surely you—"

"Nothing at all is sure any longer," Percy, he cut me off. His eyes seemed hollow, vacant and far-away. "I have found what I was searching for, you see, nothing can ever be the same."

"Honor me," I forced a grin, "and explain exactly what it is you've found. That seems a good place to begin to unravel this nonsense and return you to your senses."

He looked at me with eyes filled with such anguish that my mind whirled in confusion. "Nothing, Percy," he repeated, "nothing can be the same. I have peeked the veil, torn it asunder, and I have peered beyond it to that which was hidden. They are watching for me now, and I dare not leave the circle."

"They?" I queried, palms beginning to cool with cold sweat. "Who, and where are they? We are alone here, alone in a room full of old relics and scented smoke."

"No, that is only the outward appearance," he reached out, placing a pale, trembling hand on my arm for emphasis. "Do you remember our last conversation? We spoke of reality."

"I remember a silly notion you brought forth about reality being only a product of our own desires, surely you aren't referring to that nonsense?"

"I am," He stated flatly. "I have come upon knowledge, forbidden knowledge, and now there is no way to turn back."

"Nonsense," I asserted, rising to my feet. "You are coming out of here with

"Surely you don't wish me to believe mirrors are conspiring to subjugate humanity...I am an imaginative man, but not that imaginative..."

me now, before this gets completely out of hand, and we're going to see a doctor."

Eric made no move to follow, only dropping his head pathetically into his hands. "You don't believe me," he choked out. "Percy, for God's sake, I am not neurotic. I fear for my soul! They are in the mirror, waiting for me!"

It was worse than I'd thought. He was shaking uncontrollably, quivering in fear. Reluctantly, I resigned myself to humoring him for the moment. Returning to my seat on the floor, I said, "Eric, tell me, then. Convince me of what you fear, and if you do not, then I will bear you out of here by the strength of my own two arms, and no nonsense."

Starting intently on a shadow of beyond my shoulder, he began once more to speak. His voice had a distant, echoing quality, perhaps an illusion of the great empty chamber in which we sat, and the growing shadows that surrounded us.

"I started with the sky," he began. "I had determined that, if my theory were correct, there would be something else behind every sight that met my eyes, a deeper level of reality. The question, of course, was how to see it. The knowledge, or theory, that something lies hidden in an illusion, is not enough to dissolve the mental conditioning of a lifetime. I searched for hours, even trying hallucinogenic drugs, in an attempt to find a deeper truth in the sky. I found nothing."

"Then I had an idea. There are several occult practices in the realm of what is known as visualization. One is the manipulation in your own mind an image of such clarity that you can smell, even taste it. I studied this at great length during my time among the Rostrocian Order."

I stopped the smile from flooding my features, but only just. My memories of Eric during the period he'd just mentioned were both amusing and vivid. He'd thought himself the correct, for a while.

"I decided," he continued, "to take this concept one step further. Choosing the image of a great, curtained window, I put myself into a deeper trance and began to visualize in the manner of my training. I have quite a talent for this particular discipline,

it took very little time to create my window. Previously, this image, as well as that of a great, ornate door, had been used as links to certain realizations of self, doors to my subconscious, you might say. This time I determined to go yet another step. I opened my eyes slowly, forcing the image to remain clear by deepened concentration. What I now sought to achieve was the superimposing of my image onto the screen of the sky."

"At first, I wavered; all I could see was blue. Then this began to blur, my eyes crossing somewhat, as if looking not directly at the sky, but out of the corners of my sight. This began to create a void, one I was able to weave my own images upon."

"The window?"

"Yes," he sighed, "but that was just the beginning. After a few moments of the euphoria of success, I began to follow the usualization of things to its conclusion. I began to open the curtains I had implanted on the sky, to see what lay beyond the cool, pleasant blue we take for granted."

"And you saw something? A hallucination, perhaps?"

"No hallucination, Percy." His eyes snapped back from the shadows to claim mine with an almost audible snap of energy. I nearly jumped. "I saw a deepening, swirling void, Percy. There were no clouds, no dust, nothing at all but endless circles. I felt drawn to their center—pulled, and I fancied that my back lifted from the solid surface beneath me, beginning to spin, turning with the vortex that spun faster, darker, and deeper every second within the squared expanse of the window I'd created."

"I ripped my eyes free with only the greatest of efforts, closing them and struggling frantically to erase from them the accursed image of that window. My arms and legs were numb, disconnected from my control, and the spinning sensation continued for what seemed an eternity. I was awash with nausea, unable to stabilize my churning stomach or my chaotic thoughts."

"Eventually, I awakened as if from a dream. My head ached as if I'd single-handedly emptied a fifth of cheap Scotch. I rose and looked about myself. It had grown dark. I glanced upward at the starry blackness, or where it should have been, and was

struck immediately by a wave of vertigo, dropping me back to my knees. The world seemed to shift beneath me, the air to whirl. I clamped my eyes closed again and staggered to my feet. I have never experienced such a terror. Percy, I fear to look upward, feared I would be sucked into the void and lost for eternities...."

When my own mind had resumed control, I ran, my eyes rooted to the ground beneath my feet."

"Eric, I cut in, alarmed. "You mentioned a hallucinogenic drug. Where you..."

"No, Percy," he stated earnestly. "I swear to you that I was on nothing stronger than a single shot of Scotch, and that several hours before. I saw what I saw, and it is still there. Percy, the sky is in an illusion!"

Now certain that he was in dire need of help, I determined to get him out of the house. I placed my hand firmly upon his arm. "Eric, you have to come with me, man. Look at yourself. This is insanity!"

"But there is more," he cried, shaking free and backing away slightly. "Mirrors, Percy, and backing away slightly. Mirrors, Percy, they are not what they seem, either. I have seen, and have been seen, and we are not alone."

"Surely you don't wish me to believe mirrors are conspiring to subjugate humanity? I tried to answer lightly. "I am an imaginative man, but not that imaginative."

"Do not jest, Percy," he cried, eyes flaring in anger. "I will show you, damn it all! You may laugh then, but you will see! You will see more than you wish."

He leapt to his feet, then, running to the hallway, almost scurrying. I followed as quickly as I could, intending to make certain he did not escape me to return to that shadowed pit of a room.

He stood, when I found him, directly in front of the covered mirror. His countenance in the deepening shadow was spectral, ethereal. I shivered despite myself.

"Come," Eric demanded, "gaze into the mirror. You will see. Reflections are merely a defense, a screen erected by our minds against comprehension of truth we want to not part of. Come on, if you dare, and prove me insane!"

My heart pounded, crashing so loudly within my ears that I could feel the warm pulsing of blood through my veins, could feeling me back to my knees. The world seemed to shift beneath me, the air to whirl. I clamped my eyes closed again and staggered to my feet. I have never experienced such a terror. Percy, I fear to look upward, feared I would be sucked into the void and lost for eternities...."

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"Look at it, Eric, look! It's only you..."

I reeled backward, crashing painfully into the opposite wall and falling to the floor. Eric screamed, screamed in terror beyond my comprehension, screamed until the very pressure of the sound blocked thought from my brain. I could see him standing, eyes glued to the mirror, waving back and forth—entranced.

I could not rise to help. My mind would not even consider it. His reflection, when I had raised him to the mirror, had not been there. Instead, a swirling blackness had appeared, a hole in the reflective surface, a nothingness. As I'd fallen back, reaching to cover my eyes, a movement had grasped at my mind. Eyes—I think they were eyes—coalesced in the maelstrom of nothingness, staring. They had seen me, just before I fell away, and now they had Eric!

I heard a scuffling sound. Was something clawing free of that damnable hole? I looked up, fearing to the depths of my soul what I would see. I followed the scuffling sounds to their source. Then I screamed. My mind blanked, bending with the sound, emptying of sanity. The scuffling sound was Eric: his fingernails. They were clutching vainly at the sides of a black void that had replaced the mirror in its frame. His head was gone, up to the shoulders, sucked into the whirling maelstrom of darkness.

Scrambling to my hands and knees, I began to claw my way down the hallway, careening off walls, caroming from furniture. I broke a large vase and crawled through its shattered pieces, embedding them painfully in the flesh of my hands. The door loomed before me like the im-

penetrable wall of some vast fortress, every shadow, every object seemed to take on an ominous, other-worldly importance. Threats beckoned, thinly veiled, from pulsing shadows. My mind could not sort it out.

I thumbed open the door, rushed outside, and ran, never stopping, never looking up, through the park, across darkened streets, and finally into my home.

I have covered the mirrors, and the windows. I have spoken to no one. Who could I tell? What if, in their ignorance, they tried to cure me as I did Eric? What if they put me before a mirror? Did I see what I believed I'd seen, or was it some strange, psychic projection from Eric's own madness? It was night, were the walls around me solid, or illusory? The floor? Could I tumble to hell by looking deeper into the wooden slats beneath me?

There is no answer. Two choices have presented themselves to me. The first is this: I should go to the door, cast it open, and gaze into the cool, calming depths of the night-darkened sky. Then I should go to Eric and drag him from the insanity he'd enmeshed himself so deeply in that I'd been dragged behind, beyond the strength of reason and rational thought.

I have chosen the second. I have called the emergency room at the hospital, they are on their way now. If my theory is correct, my memories should hold the world together as long as no further disruptive data reaches them. The two pencils are sharp. I only pray that my eyes are the key. At least I shall never again look into a mirror. I will be safe.



UNDER THE SKIN

by Rodger Gerberding

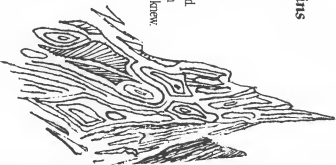
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The Use of Mountains

The mountains are available for ceremony. Their shadowy night shapes could be as old as the bones of dinosaurs or new as that last dark breath. They can even more about if you wish, though slowly, tied to the music of the moon, the kiss of the wind. They can follow like strangers or change in a moment like the friend you thought you knew. I use them all the time as the brooding geography of my heart, the uneasy source of dreams, as I lie in bed, eyes haunted by that mass of mystery, drawing them in through the window.

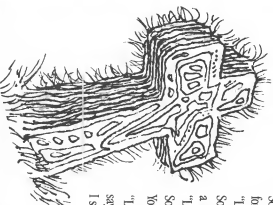
—John Grey



The Lugging

"Last one out's something rotten."
So we used to say, scrambling for the pool's slippery edge.
"Last one over's a goner."
So we used to say, jumping a mean neighbor's hedge.
"Last one left is a loser."
So I said, on a building
You leaped off the ledge.
"Last one out's something rotten,"
says your headstone's engraving.
I stand at the grave's open edge.

—Carl Buckman



WE ARE SEVEN

BY JIM SHELLEY



In an all too conspicuous silence, Diana and Officer Royce walked down the stark white halls of the Tampa Bay Detention Center. As she passed by the holding cells' plexiglass windows, she caught quick glimpses of men reading, watching TV, and sleeping. Out of nervous agitation, she finally asked, "Does he have a name?"

"He calls himself 'Angstrom,'" Royce said. The officer's voice was deep and gruff from years of off duty drinking. Normally it radiated a warm feeling of confidence. Today it was tinged with an uneasy inflection.

Diana wrote the name on her legal pad. Her hand left a wet spot on the paper.

"Will you be with us during the interview?"

"Yes and no. There's a two way mirror in the room. I'll be watching with two other officers. If you need any help, we'll be there before you can blink."

"Why can't you stay in the room?"

"He said he wouldn't talk to anyone but you. Don't worry. He's been handcuffed and shackled to one of the chairs and everything in the room is bolted to the floor. You'll be perfectly..."

"Safe. I know, my editor told me all that. I'm still scared."

"That's understandable. To be truthful, he scares me too. Not because of what he's done or how he looks, but because he's utterly insane and you can feel it."

An awkward moment of silence followed. One of the veteran reporters should be doing this interview, Diana thought. I'll screw this up. Maybe that's what he wants. Then he can have his lawyers throw the case out of court or something.

"I really think this interview is a waste of time," she said.

"You may be right," Royce nodded. "We haven't been able to get him to say more than a few words at a time. He seems to have trouble talking. We're hoping he'll tell you more than he told us. Remember, he may be responsible for more deaths than we know about."

JIM SHELLEY

"But that doesn't seem likely, does it? I mean, he didn't seem to try and hide his tracks very hard. From what I've heard, he left fingerprints at every scene and the list of witnesses for the prosecution reads like a phone book. He was even videotaped during the Boswell murder. The public never gets to see the tape, but I hear it's pretty gruesome."

"It is," Royce said. "The FBI sent us a copy so we could confirm his identity. Gruesome doesn't really describe it, though. The savage violence that comes across when you watch it is..."

"Uh, so you're certain it's him?" Diana said, trying to change the subject.

"Yes."

They reached the door to the interrogation room, and as Royce opened it, he patted Diana on the back.

"Good luck."

Diana didn't reply. She walked into the room very slowly, as if approaching a vicious dog, just as Royce had said. Angstrom was confined to a very sturdy looking wood and metal chair in front of a long white table. His back was to her. Long black hair hung from the right side of his head and ran down past his shoulders. The left side was scarred dark brown and completely hairless.

She walked to the table and sat down across from him. Without ever looking directly at him, she spread several articles from *Time*, *The New York Post*, *USA Today* and her paper *The Tampa Chronicle* on the table to her left. They were just a handful of the articles that had been written about Angstrom. In some he was "The Unidentified Killer." In others, he was referred to as "the Burnt Man." A few were accompanied by composite sketches and FBI photos.

Because Diana was unfamiliar with the history of the "Burnt Man Murders," her editor had given her clips to study. He had also given her a yellow legal pad covered with questions. She put the pad on the table to her left and quickly reviewed the ques-

"Some people are calling it one of the most brutal acts of mass murder ever committed in America. Why did you do it?"

tions. There were three pages of them. Directly in front of her, in the middle of the table, she placed her tape recorder. As she turned it on, she took a quick glimpse at Angstrom's face.

Almost thirty seconds passed before she realized she was staring.

His nose, mouth and right eye were normal. With his long black hair and piercing blue eyes, he might have passed for a rock star...were it not for the rest of his face.

The scarred portion of his head extended across the front of his face, stopping right between his eyes and running diagonally down his left cheek. The edges of the scar were thick black lines which emphasized the contrast between the burnt flesh and the rest of his skin. It was as if the hands of a clock had been implanted on his face, and as they ticked off the hours they were slowly revealing a monster. According to the clock, it was 4:00.

When Diana realized she was staring, she was staring, and abruptly slammed out the first question: "Why did you turn yourself in?"

In a cold, cruel voice thick with rage and disgust, Angstrom said, "I saw. I see. I am Angstrom."

Diana was about to ask him her next question when she realized he was about to say something else. His eyes were closed and his brow wrinkled in concentration. The muscles in his neck, strained and his face was flushed with blood. Finally his lips curled back and he spat out a single word. "Persuasion."

His breathing was hard and heavy as if he'd been jogging and his face was now covered with perspiration.

Diana simply stared at him. She didn't know what to make out of what she'd seen. He waited until he was breathing normally and then asked her next question.

"In Dallas, Texas, you decapitated the Reverend Charles Boswell in front of five thousand witnesses. In Hollywood, you slashed open Terry DeGarmo's throat. Did you kill them because you were envious of

their fate?"

Again, the seething monotone:

"I saw, I see. I am Angstrom."

And again, the silent struggle as Angstrom forced himself to say, "Persuasion."

He stared at Diana as if asking for help. She grabbed the arm of her chair and looked at another question.

"Anthony Tate, Bruce Wilkerson and Joseph Lombardo. Do these names mean anything to you?"

Angstrom tilted his head to the right and rolled his eyes in restrained annoyance.

"They were police detectives in Chicago. A year and a half ago they were found burned to death at the bottom of a hill where Tate's car had gone off the road.

Witnesses say you were seen drinking with them on the night they died. The Chicago police don't think that your presence was accidental or coincidental.

"Did you kill them?"

Angstrom stared mutely at the tape recorder.

"Two months ago you apparently went on a one-night killing spree in the city of Greenville, Ohio. Among the 43 people murdered were four police officers and the town's city manager. Do you have some sort of vendetta against public officials?"

This time the eyes rolled in disbelief. By the on his face, Diana could tell that as he struggled to say "persuasion," he was experiencing pain. When he finally managed to say it, it came out as a pleading whisper.

"What do you mean by 'persuasion'?"

Angstrom gazed at her as if in anticipation.

Diana looked to her left and saw the Time article she'd brought.

"Police also think you are responsible for an explosion which took place 34 months ago at the Hillshire Country Club in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. A debutante ball was being held in the club and a total of 237 people were attending. No one survived. Some people are calling it one of the most brutal acts of mass murder ever committed in America. Why did you do it?"

In a mix of disappointment and despair, Angstrom tilted his head down.

"I saw, I see..."

"Damn it, Angstrom, I'm tired of that. Tell me something or I'm leaving."

With a sudden surge, Angstrom jerked upright in his seat and his eyes beamed with a sense of relief. A long, deep smile spread across his face. It made Diana shiver.

"Diana," he said in a controlled voice. "If you could have killed Adolf Hitler while he was still a housepainter, would you have done so?"

Shaken by the use of her name, she answered without thinking, "Yes."

"What if he was attending a housepainter's convention and you didn't know which one he was? Would you kill every painter that attended?"

"That's different. I'm not sure. I don't think so. Tell me what this has to do with you."

"Suppose I told you that one of the fathers attending that ball was destined to be another Hitler?"

"Wait. I'm totally lost. Could you start from the beginning?"

Angstrom gave the room's two way mirror a quick glance. Slowly, he leaned forward in his chair as close to Diana as his handicaps would permit.

"We are seven, he said, his voice barely above a whisper. Diana moved her tape recorder closer to him.

"Go on."

"Devastation. Deception. Rejuvenation. Manipulation. Possession. Recognition. And Persuasion. Seven sons of flesh and force. This world's destiny and its damnation."

"Can you be a little more specific?"

"Recognition. That's my power. It means I can read people, tell what they're thinking and feeling. Strengths, weaknesses, hopes, fears. I can see them all. However, despite all its possible applications, it was considered to be the weakest of the seven powers. That underestimation cost five of my brothers their lives."

"I still don't understand."

"The first was Anthony Tate, the police detective in Chicago. He was the youngest of the seven. You would have called his power psychokinesis. With a glance he could burn a person in a fireflash. His power had

years before it reached its full potency. Still, in his prime, he would have been able to incinerate entire cities.

"Because he was my first target and had no reason to fear me, his murder was the easiest to plan. It involved all of getting him too drunk to use his power, and rolling his car off a hill. It would look just like an unfortunate accident. This was important because I didn't want to put the rest of my brothers on their guard any sooner than necessary."

"I called him from a Holiday Inn Lounge on the outskirts of Chicago, told him I was passing by and wanted to know if he'd like to get together. He was delightfully surprised to hear from me and said he'd meet me when he got off his shift."

Angstrom's left hand rose and touched the scarred portion of his face.

"Unfortunately, nothing ever goes as planned."

"True to his word, he arrived at the lounge after his shift, but he also brought two of his buddies from work with him."

Angstrom looked at his hands and in a mocking baritone said, "From the very first it seems the blood of innocents would stain my hands." He clenched his hands tightly, ugly fists and a sardonic smile spread across his face.

"But then, no one's really innocent, are they?"

"Go back to Tate and Chicago."

"We sat down at a booth I had picked out near a big window and ordered drinks. When they were about halfway through with theirs, I said I had to go make a business call and excused myself. I then went outside where I could see them through the table's window. I waited until they finished their drinks and were halfway through their refills before coming back in. On my way in I gave a waitress a hundred dollar bill and told her to have me paged about every fifteen minutes."

"Every time I was paged, I would wait for them to reorder drinks before coming back to the table. This way they were drinking two drinks to my every one."

"As planned, I volunteered to drive them home in return for a 'cheaper' than the usual Holiday Inn place to stay and Tony agreed."

"About two miles down the highway we just missed a recon or something, and found the car on the edge of the road overlooking a very nasty ravine. I got out to see what type of shape the car was in. I left it in neutral."

"Now it should have been easy from there. Car rolls down hill. Explosives. Everybody dies. Happy ending."

"And for a second or two, it actually looked like that might happen. The car rolled down the hill, did two somersaults and burst into flame."

"From the top of the hill I watched it burn, overcome with relief, satisfaction and pride. I felt invincible. I was thinking how easy things were going to be..."

"When one of the car doors swung open."

"It was Tony."

"Completely engulfed in fire..."

"That laughing. And stargazing. This scene was shaky and his eyes burned with drunken lunacy. After a minute or two, he finally stopped laughing and called out, 'I NEVER LIKED YOU ANYWAY.' He sat me on fire."

"What happened next is somewhat unclear, as I was rolling on the ground and screaming at the time. From what I remember, it seems the car exploded while Tony was still standing near it. A piece of the hood took off his head. Without Tony's coat over the fire, I was able to extinguish my burning body—though with massive third degree burns."

"I was lucky."

Diana stared at him in disgusted disbelief.

"So tell me why only a small part of your head looks burnt. What about the rest of you?"

"Rejuvenation. It's Bonswell's power. Of all the seven he has the least power. Had he the power to heal—himself, as well as others."

"Which was why he became a televangelist. I take it?"

Angstrom nodded. "After the fire, I had gone to a hospital where they treated my burns and wrapped me up. The doctors wanted me to stay for a while, but I knew as soon as the news of the Tate fire broke, I'd be taken in for questioning, so I went

as I was, I headed for Dallas and Boswell.

"Boswell's power works like a battery. He can only heal a select number of people at a time, then he has to stop and 'recharge.' During that period was the only time he was vulnerable. On the day I arrived in Dallas, I went to the studio where they tape his show. There was a secretary in charge of making out the list of people to be healed that day. She said the list was filled for a month and that I would have to wait. I showed her \$500, and she took a blind woman from Alabama off the list and put me on it. Said there'd been a cancellation." Angstrom chuckled softly.

"When the show started, the 'sicks of the day,' as I heard a stagehand refer to us, were put in a long line that led to the center stage podium where Boswell was laying on hands. There were only 50 people in front of me, so as Boswell began his healings, I let people behind me cut in front. I had to time it so that I would be the last person he could use his power on.

"When he announced that only one more person could feel the Lord's touch that day, I was the one standing before him.

"Because of the damage I incurred in the fire, he didn't recognize me until he started using his power on me. After a few minutes my burnt flesh began to resume its natural tone and texture, and he realized who I was. His face....

"Knowing I was one of the seven, he wanted to heal me all the more. As you can see, he was just about finished restoring my body when he ran out of energy.

"He whispered to me to wait backstage and he would finish treating my burns at the end of the show. I graciously accepted his offer. He told the audience that the work of the Lord is not always easy and asked a blank eyed blonde to escort me to the Divine Guest Room.

"I thanked her all the same, turned to Boswell, who was starting his sermon, and reached into my jacket for....

"A machete. I know. Tell me why you decided not to use a gun. Wouldn't it have been...." Diana groaned for words. "Cleaner."

"The problem with a gun is simple. Metal got from Dallas and set up in Chapel Hill, he had spent thousands of dollars on security

Remember, this is Dallas. They're slightly paranoid about people with guns. The

machete I used was made in a city in Africa called Simalia during the 19th century when British trade embargoes made metal hard to come by. It has a tensile strength of high grade steel and the weight of a baseball bat. Properly wielded, it is extremely lethal. One quick stroke with a full follow through, and....

"And you just walked out of the studio? No one tried to stop you?"

"I see, I saw...."

"Tell me how you got out."

"In the chaos and confusion that followed Boswell's deprecation, no one had enough sense or courage to try and stop me. People go into a sort of daze when they witness a truly violent event. They're very open to suggestion. In short, were a bloody machete in people's faces, and they get the hell out of your way."

"Angstrom's eyes glazed over and he broke into a deep, slow chuckle. Diana started to smile, then stopped. NO! she thought. He's not funny, not likable, not even believable. He's sick and insane. Don't forget it. She looked down at her notes and without looking back up said, "After Dallas was the Debraune Ball in Chapel Hill. Tell me about that!"

"Henry Roarkie, a Political Science professor at the University of North Carolina. He had the power of Deception. Illusion.

"The ability to make you see what he wanted you to see. I couldn't take the chance of coming into direct confrontation with him, because I would always question the reality of the outcome."

"Exploit."

"With Boswell, I used a machete, plain and simple. With Roarkie, I would never have been able to do that, because I would have been sure if he were standing where I thought he was, if he actually cut or missed him, or if he was mortally wounded or just scratched. With Roarkie, what you see is not always what you get."

"Okay, go on!"

"The problem was Tate's and Boswell's deaths put him on his guard. By the time I got from Dallas and set up in Chapel Hill, he had spent thousands of dollars on security

for his home and cars. I tried following his daily routine so I could get an idea of where would be the best place to try something. That didn't work either because he started changing the ways he went to the University and his classes, always alternating routes. He also became more reclusive, going to less and less social functions. It took six months of investigation and observation before I came up with a plan."

"The Deb Ball?"

"It was the one event I knew he couldn't miss. Partly because I think he felt it would be safe, and also because of his blind devotion to his daughter. I always got the impression that deep down, he had a thing for her. Talking to him sometimes he would say things like....

"Skip that, and go on to the Ball."

"Using some connections I had in Charlotte, I was able to get explosive plaques from the North Carolina chapter of the Outlaws, a second rate Hell's Angels type of biker gang. They have all the vices of the Angels, without any of the political or legal savvy. They're a bit more expensive, but if I had gone to the Angels I would've probably gotten turned in to the FBI in exchange for an early parole for one of their brothers. By now I was pretty sure my face was making the rounds in most cop shops.

"The detonator was a nine volt battery and a pocket alarm clock. I got with a subscription to *Sports Illustrated*. Posing as an exterminator checking for termites, I was able to implant the explosives two days ahead of the ball. It was the easiest and quickest way I could think to get both Roarkie and his daughter."

"Why his daughter?"

"I saw. I see. I am Angstrom."

"Diana bit her lip in frustration.

"Okay, tell me about Hollywood."

"Terry DeGarmo. Manipulative. He could control your emotions. From the most intense fear to the deepest love, he wielded the entire emotional spectrum. It's what made him such a good actor. You always felt what he wanted you to feel.

"I wanted to use explosives on him too, but by this time, the police and FBI had given a composite drawing of me to the

papers so I wasn't as free to observe his daily routine as I was with Roarkie. There was, however, one thing in my favor and that was that DeGarmo wasn't as cautious or clever as the rest of the seven. I sent him a letter telling him where and when he could meet me. I chose the parking lot of a McDonalds at 4:30 in the morning."

"And he showed up and was killed. Tell me why he wasn't afraid of you."

"As I said, among the seven I considered to have the weakest power, Recognition. DeGarmo's power is much stronger than mine. The problem was, he relied too much on his power. He thought he would be walking with a gun and that he could get me to kill myself by inducing a suicidal depression in me."

"He had two wives that died of suicide. Did he do that, too?"

"...As I shot her with her own gun, I could feel a psychic scream in my head. She had been a channel and the person on the other end was feeling all her pain as she died..."

"I saw...."

"Sorry, Go on!"

"When he arrived that night, all I had was a ghetto blaster and earplugs. I was sitting at one of the antique tables when he drove up. He was in a bright red Alfa Romeo with opaque tinted windows. They were probably bulletproof as well."

"I wanted him to see that I hadn't brought a gun. So I was only wearing a pair of bike shorts and a tank top. Not having a gun meant he would have to come up with another way for me to kill myself. It took him several minutes to come up with one."

"He stepped out of his car and acted as if he didn't know about my killing the entire emotional spectrum. He made a half-hearted attempt at small talk and offered me some coke. He put the walk and a razor blade right in front of me and then started using his power."

off the pause button on the ghetto blaster. I had set it so it wouldn't be denting, but still startling. It broke his concentration long enough for me to use his own razor to rip open his regular vein.

"He was a very predictable individual. Even without Recognition, I would have been able to read him like a book. With it, he was dead before the killing."

"That leaves Greenville, Ohio. Let me guess," Diana said. "One of the people in that town had the power of persuasion and in order to get them you had to kill everyone who talked to you?"

Angstrom shook his head vigorously.

A minute passed without a word from either of them. Diana scanned her notebook.

"Well, if it wasn't persuasion, that just leaves...possession?"

He nodded.

"So fill in the details."

"We call him The Bodiless One. He had no true body of his own, rather, his personality dwelt within the bodies of other people while residing in one temporary physical form, which in this case was Terry Anders, the town's city manager."

"Through physical contact, he could establish a temporary channel into a person's mind and take control of them at any given instant. The time that such a channel would remain open without renewed use was twenty-four hours, but eventually it would have grown to a week, then a month, then a year until eventually one touch from them would be all it'd take to make you susceptible to his domination for the rest of your life."

"Getting at him was easy. If he'd been more cautious he would have taken residence in another body, which would have made finding him next to impossible, but The Bodiless One wasn't even remotely like the rest of us. He had no concern for what went on in the "outside" world. He lived in his own little microcosm in Greenville. Virtually every person in the town was a channel for him, over 3600 people possessed and driven by a single entity."

"Controlling that many minds took nearly all of his concentration. Yet, as his power grew, he would find it easier and easier. Eventually he would have started

expanding his boundaries past Greenville, past Ohio, until...."

"Wait," she said, looking down at another list. "What does that have to do with your killing a clerk in a Mink Market, seven pedestrians, four people waiting for a bus, eight people in the express line of a train, four people in a Kruschev Kermel, fourteen people in a movie theater, and seven police officers who were trying to stop you?"

"Tell me, were all those deaths really necessary?"

"Unfortunately, yes. Killing Anders was easy. He was so unwrapped in his own world that he was unprepared for me. I simply waited outside of his office on a Friday afternoon and shot him as he entered his car. It was too quick for him to jump into another body. However, I hadn't counted on his having a son."

"I didn't realize my mistake at first, and as a matter of fact, I was almost out of town before Anders' son caught up with me."

"I was in a Mink Market paying for gas. The clerk was a tall, thin woman with a beautiful hairdo. She didn't seem frightened by my burns, which should have tipped me off, but I was more concerned with what type of Top Tans they had. Right as I was reaching in the milk freezer, I looked into the circular mirror in the corner of the store. She was lowering a shotgun at me."

"I spun into the next aisle, but I was a little slow. Part of the blast caught the back of my left leg. Unable to stand, I watched the clerk lie in the mirror, wondering when she'd try again. She didn't. She just stood there listening. I decided to play possum."

"After about a minute of silence, she came out from behind the counter. When she saw me on the floor, her mouth made a small 'o.' She lowered her gun within inches of my hand and bent down to feel my pulse. A very stupid mistake."

"As I sat her with her own gun, I could feel a psychic scream in my head. She had been a channel and the person on the other end was feeling all her pain as she died. The Anders kid could control the townspeople like his father, but he didn't have the maturity or strength to shield himself from their emotions in the process."

"So your killing spree was actually an

attack directed against him?"

Angstrom nodded. "It lasted quite a while. The kid tried to kill me with his police while I made drivers taking out pedestrians and whoever else I could find. It wasn't very hard because the kid wasn't able to juggle minds very well—all the cops had slow reflexes and delayed reaction times. After I took out the people in the movie theater, I could tell he would be near the edge. His cops stopped chasing me and lights were going out in the town like in a World War II movie. Eventually he had a group of firemen meet me in the middle of the street. They told me the kid was giving himself up and to follow them. They led me to a house on the edge of the city. I went inside. His mother was sitting at a table, tears running down her face. She grabbed my hand and took me upstairs and showed me his room. He was lying in bed and paralyzed, one enter the room. I was a psychiatrist. Looking at him I could tell he would never be a threat like the rest of the seven. I pointed the magnum directly at him and considered his fate."

"Tell me you didn't kill him."

"I didn't kill him." The words hung in the air without the weight of any emotional content.

Diana looked at her list. One question remained unanswered.

"Why did you turn yourself in?"

"I saw, I see, I am Angstrom."

"Tell me what that means."

"It means nothing. It is what I was told to say upon being asked questions. Persuasion."

"The last of the seven. He got to you before you got to him?"

"I saw, I see...."

"Stop saying that and talk to me."

"Recognition. That's my power. It means I can read people. I can tell what they're thinking and feeling. As my power increased, I grew disenchanted with my brothers' plans of conquest and decided I would 'sit this one out' as they say."

However, I knew this decision would not go down well with my brethren and that they would act with homicidal paranoia. That being the case, I decided to get them first. I almost succeeded."

"But you missed one?"

"Yes. I was in a motel near the highway waiting for a call from an informant. Somehow he must have gotten to my informant and found out where I was staying. He tracked me down and called me at the motel. The sound of his voice was all it took. Even on the phone his commands are irresistible. He told me to turn myself in and say nothing but I saw, I see, I am Angstrom. I assume he had the intention of making me out to be a deranged zealot. Only through pain and concentration could I say anything else."

"Who is it?"

"Remember what I said about Hitler?"

"Yes."

"Remember what I said about getting both Roemer and his daughter?"

"Yes, but what does that...?"

Diana's voice stuck in her throat and her eyes focused on nothing. She mechanically shut off the tape recorder.

"That's why you picked me to interview you, isn't it?"

"Yes. Any children we have inherit the powers."

"You know I don't believe you."

"Part of you does. It is a very small part, and yes, as time passes and your father becomes more powerful, it will grow. And you will recognize your own power."

"No, no, no...."

"When the time comes, you will make the right decision. I can see it."

With the room spinning around her, Diana scooped up her notes and tape recorder and stumbled out the door.

Outside, Officer Boyce ran up to her and before he could say anything, she asked him for a telephone.

He took her into his office and handed it to her.

After three rings a voice answered on the other end.

"Hello?"

"That, this is Diana I have to ask you."

"Oh, Diana. I've got both Senator Bagwell and Senator Covart on hold. Call me back later."

She gently replaced the receiver—unable to resist—and started crying.

DEATHREALM

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Mind Hatching

The tarantula of orators
reveals in the anticipation
of his victim's slow bleed:
threads of tainted philosophies
spun from opium-induced dementia.
Like a voracious cocoon,
he waits for the hatch.

—Cathy Buburuz

(Continued from page 25)

comic work? Is there an underlying philosophy that is common in your writing—in other words, do you strive to write meta-physics? Or do you just want to scare people? SMITH: A hefty portion of my fiction is based in metaphor, which is kind of strange considering that I never much cared for symbolism. I like my messages right out in the open, in black and white in letters ten feet high. Sometimes do try to make some kind of statement on what a bitch it is to ride this boat and not capsize. But just as much of my work is straight fantasy with no underlying meaning beyond an attempt at delivering a chill or a dark chuckle. Much of the time all I'm trying to do is scare the reader, to give him what he's fringing paid for.

DEATHREALM: Is your background one of horror? I don't mean was your father a mass murderer and your mother a vampire, but did your interest in dark things grow from a natural tendency towards them as a youth (as mine did), or was it a subject that gradually developed due to external circumstances?

SMITH: When I was eight years old, my father gave me a book on evolution, and that laid the foundation for a way of thinking

figure it n, a thing that has no existence except in the imagination.

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based on logic and skepticism. Since I've been old enough to think and reason, I've been a materialist with no belief whatsoever in the supernatural. At roughly the same time my dad was offering me science books I got a real kick reading about gods and demons and weird, impossible goings-on when my mom gave me two books: **THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES** and **THE OCTOBER COUNTRY**. I guess I can blame Bradbury for getting me started on writing horror fiction.

Beyond that, I couldn't really say. I do try to write about fears, about losing something. Other than that, I'm not sure what triggers the creative urge and haven't ever investigated it too deeply, to tell you the truth.

DEATHREALM: Who are your favorite horror writers? What subject matter within the genre do you find most appealing?

SMITH: My favorite horror writers are, from the past, Lovecraft, Howard, Leiber, Bradbury and the whole **WEIRD TALES** group. Of the more recent pack, I like Karl Wagner, Ramsey Campbell, Dennis Eichen, David Drake, Steve Kasnic Jan, and Robert Altman kind of stands alone. When you talk about the really new folk, I enjoy Lisa Tuttle, David Schow, Joe Lanford,

Oser, and Wayne Salter—there's a shitload of excellent writers working in the anthology market and in the small press, I could go on forever. I really think the two most important among us are Jeff Oser, for sheer original vision, and Wayne Salter, who writes work that transcends the genre, and will definitely garner wide recognition.

What I like about the genre is that it supports, through sheer enthusiasm of its publishers—if not financially—a strong small press movement that does give a place for good stories to be seen; if even they're seen by a limited audience.

DEATHREALM: What do you not like about the genre? Who are your least favorite writers—and why?

SMITH: I think what frustrates me most about the genre, currently, is that there are virtually no professional markets for fiction. **WEIRD TALES** publishes plenty of good fantasy yarns, but the editors don't seem to know or care what makes a good horror story. **TWILIGHT ZONE** and **NIGHT CRY** are gone, but they were never really an open market for new writers. If it weren't for a few anthologies and Wagner's at **YEAR'S BEST 5**, I doubt many people would see the best of what's being written—and most of the good stuff still gets lost in the small press in circulations of less than a thousand.

My least favorite writers are the ones who are lavished with what I feel is undeserved praise. First and foremost on my list here would be Clive Barker. He's done some nice stuff, but certainly not deserving of the attention his work has received. There are a LOT of bad novels out there, stuff that should never have seen the light, but that list, too, would be overlong, so why get started?

In addition, many writers frustrate me for not taking horror down any new paths. Most seem to be content merely rehashing old concepts. I hate to sound like a broken record, but that's probably the main reason the work of Jeff Oser and Wayne Salter so fascinates me—they're so bloody different!

DEATHREALM: What do you foresee in the horror market? For yourself? **SMITH:** I see the market shrinking a bit, both professionally and in the small press. Already, from talking with novelists and agents I know, the market for novel length

work has dried up considerably, with people like Stephen King gobbling up vast advances that leave nothing in the budgets to risk on untested novelists. Whether this is due to an actual drop in sales or to skittish editors is a question I can only guess at. The genre enjoyed quite a boom in the past few years, and now it seems to be bust time. Still and all, I am currently working on a new novel, and have plotted three more.

As for myself, I have several opportunities and projects currently moving along in the comics medium, including a three issue science fiction series, an anthology of my horror work all illustrated by artist Mike Hoffman and several other scripting jobs. (If **DEATHREALM**'s readers would like to see Mark Kasey and Jeff Oser dismembered in gory detail, they should keep their eyes peeled for **HELLRAISER** #6.) I keep bashing my head against the comic market, with some results. Regardless of what happens concerning my two completed novels, I intend to continue to produce novel length fiction, and of course I take time out from all of the other to write short stories. Despite the hard realities, the frustrations and broken promises, it's still a lot of fun.





RED WAS FORGETTING something again. He rubbed at his forehead and reached for his shirt pocket where he kept his little notepad.

"Fred! Fred, are you listening to me?"

The voice cracked at him through the receiver he held pressed to his ear, black plastic mashing cartilage. *Damn, he'd almost forgotten he was talking on the phone!* His mind wandered too much, distracted. "Yes, Will. I'm listening. Just go on for a second. That's all." It was Will Hampton, old friend, bothering him about PenCo again.

"Well, you'd better listen to me. This means as much to you as it does to the rest of us."

Fred plucked the small notepad from his pocket. *Yes, he was definitely forgetting something.* Flipping past the first page, which was covered in his chicken scratch, he tossed it to the desk top, whipped a pen from the Georgia Bulldogs coffee mug that was stationed nearby; and he began to scribble. "Yes, Will. Important. That's what you keep saying." His voice betrayed his disinterest and boredom.

"I'm telling you this is bad news! For all of us. My doctor—Sean Seagraves over at Memorial—he got the report back from my examination last month. There's been chromosome damage. Do you understand what I'm saying? Do you?" Fred Dorman could hear the anger lurking just beneath the surface of his old chum's voice.

Fred scribbled. *Seggy, dctr, Mem Hos*

"Seagraves, you say?"

A sigh of frustration. "Yes, Seagraves. Sean Eugene Seagraves."

Dorman pen jotted its way across the narrow page, dancing just beneath the warped blinder, dark just beneath the "Chromosome damage. I don't understand. You seemed okay when I saw you last week. What does this mean. 'Chromosome damage'?"

"Chris, Fred! What the hell is wrong with you? I told you! I told you last week what all this means! I told you yesterday! This

is serious shit!"

Fred sighed, tapping the butt of his pen against the desk top, looking across at Uga the bulldog scowling back at him from his coffee cup turned pen holder. The pen leaked up again, jabbing angrily at lined paper. *Chrisn dang, W! Hm...* "Look, Will. I don't see where this has anything to do with me. What do you want me to do about it? I mean, if you're having medical problems, I can sympathize with that, but what can I do?"

There was a moment of silence from the other end. Will Hampton bit his lower lip to keep from screaming at his boyhood pal. He breathed out; Fred Dorman heard it—a long, even exhalation. "It's like this, Fred. PenCo made the stuff, the DB9. They made it to kill mosquitoes. Remember the foggers that used to ride through the neighborhood when we were kids?"

Yes, yes, he did remember that. That was one memory he had no problem with. Not at all. Fred Dorman, five years old (Will Hampton, too). Along about dusk on a summer's day in Port City Georgia. It was 1963 and the call went up. *Whoop!* The tumble of an approaching moon, growing.

The voice of a child. *"Here it comes! The mosquito truck! Yahoo!"* There it was, rattling down Trade Street, coming into view. *"Here it comes!"* Turning down M Street. *"Our street!"* The tumble grew into a mechanical roar. Loud. Loud. Duros opened wide, spitting out bare-legged children. The kids poured out of yards, out of the trees into the street they had climbed. The truck came rolling slowly on, creeping toward them at a patient ten miles per it rode low on its carriage, loaded down as it was by the huge congregation on its back: the fogger. *"It's here! It's here!"* The call went out to every kid he'd heard it. More bare legs, bare feet, screaming mouths. The truck rolled on. Behind it, thick plumes of billowing white. A child darted in, disappeared. The acrid stuff swallowed him up.

Others joined him. Fred did. Will did. They all did. All the children of Port City, Georgia who resided on M Street. There

they went, diving into the masking, smelly fog. They had no hills to race down. And it never snows in Port City. But they had a mosquito truck once a week in summer-time.

"Fred? Are you listening to what I'm saying? Goddamn it!"

The other man snapped back to attention. *Damn, what was he forgetting? Something this morning. Something at home. The keys! His pocket jingled beneath his slapping palm. No, got the keys. "Don't lose your temper." Will. I just don't see where any of this has anything to do with me.* "Damn it, Fred. Don't pull any shit on me! I voted for you! I expect you to do something about this!"

"But what..."

"It's not just me, Fred! You, too! All of us! We all used to run through that crap like it was rain or something! DB9! They don't fog it all over the streets anymore but they still make it. PenCo is still making that shit at their plant at the edge of town. Don't you see?"

Fred cleared his throat. *Something he forgot to do this morning? Some chore? He'd taken out the trash. No that's not it!* "I don't know everything that PenCo makes out at the plant, Will. But I know that they employ 2,000 people in this town. I know that they pay a goodly percentage of this city's tax monies. What is it that you want me to see?"

"What do I want you to see?" Will's voice was low and even, the raw edge gone out of it. *My little boy died last month, Fred. There's something wrong with me, too. Can you at least see that far? Pause. "Can you?"*

"Yes, Will. If not his keys, the trash, then what?" He flipped his notes back a page.

"And you, Fred. You seem to be off in space half the time. You didn't used to be like that. You didn't used to have to keep a pad and pencil to help you remember."

Fred glanced at the first page of the day. Each task was marked off as he had *accomplished it.* *Sec'd My, Sec'd City Sib B'd, Sec'd B'd:* all were lined through. *Maybe if he ran it all through his mind, he could remember what he'd forgotten.*

"Fred?"

"Yes?" The line cracked. *He'd gotten up, done those four things. Then what?*

"We're going to the state with this. Dr. Seagraves and I are going to a lawyer, a firm from Atlanta, and we're going to bring a suit against PenCo. Are you going to help us, or not?"

"You know, Will, I've got a lot of friends at PenCo. They mean a lot to this town. They're your friends, too." He started at the pad. It was coming back to him. *Sib'd Why* "Save it, Fred. Save it for your speeches in front of the Chamber of Commerce. I don't want to hear it. But I just hoped that we could count on you for this."

"Well, Will, I wish that you'd reconsider. *Sib City, Sib B'd. Chip first, then Barbara.* Then, *Sec'd B'd.*"

"Chris, Fred. Go fuck yourself." Will hung up.

After a while, Fred remembered to hang up the phone. He lifted the little pad, placed it in front of himself and jotted down what he'd forgotten to do.

By him.

He was pretty sure he could remember where he'd stored his shovel.



PARIS TROUT by Pete Decker

Penguin Books/\$7.95
306 Pages

THIS NOVEL HAS been around since 1988, the year it won the National Book Award. It bears mentioning all the same as it is still available and is the sort of book horror fans ought not to miss. You might not find it under "Horror" on the book racks, try "Literature" or "Modern Fiction"—all such distinctions being purely arbitrary.

What impresses me about the book is Decker's hard-edged, understated prose, the claustrophobic atmosphere of paranoia he creates, the psychologically disorienting effect he gives to routine acts of cruelty and revenge.

Paris Trout is a shoekeeping money-lender in Cotton Point, Georgia, circa the 1950s. He is a man of few words, yet as the novel unfolds, and as his plain-spoken philosophy presents itself, we see him as a soulless, intractable monster in human form. A sociopath who perceives himself as the center of the universe, he recognizes no laws but those of his own devising. When a black man defaults on a car loan, Trout hires a local redneck to drive him out to the man's house, where, armed with a handgun, Trout and his accomplice open fire.

A fourteen-year-old girl, present purely as a matter of circumstance, is shot by Paris Trout and dies. The murder, surely no oddly in that violently racist era, proves to be an anomaly. The helplessness of the victim, who had harmed no one, in contrast to the preponderant guilt of her killer, who displays no remorse, creates a ripple effect that disturbs the rest of the community.

As you may infer, this is no horror novel of wewewewes or creeping slime. The slime is in the heart of the title character. The murder of the child is not the end of Trout's degeneration, in an act reminiscent of Foye's assault of Temple Drake in Faulkner's *SANCTUARY*, he violates his own wife with a bottle of mineral water. He is the perfect example of the sort of aberrant personality—a Charles Whitman or Jim Jones—who, by the very nature of his unbalanced behavior, can flout and defy con-

ventional justice, balanced as it is upon a reasonable concept of moral responsibility. Paris Trout is both amoral and irresponsible.

PARIS TROUT is a very readable novel. It captures and holds interest to the end. From the manner in which an adulterous couple go about having intercourse, to the strange scene in which some bogus cops struggle to place Paris Trout in the stocks, much of what takes place in this novel sticks with you long after you have put it down. I recommend it to anyone sincerely interested in gaining insight into the darker aspects of the human mind.

BOOKS OF BLURBS, Vol. 1

By Stephen King
1990 Panther Books/\$19.95
4,589 Pages

AFTER THE SUCCESS OF *THE SHINING*, Stephen King's career as the world's foremost author of book-cover blurbs began. A rich sampling are collected here for the first time. Early efforts, such as "Terrifying" and "I scared even me"—noted now for their minimalism—are included, along with his more lurid output as of late. "I denounced it in a single sitting," although definitive King, is the subject of some controversy—there being a dispute over whether he made the statement in reference to something by Thomas Ligotti or to a pile of maniacs.

Clearly, somewhere around the time of the landmark "I have seen the future of horror... and it is named Clive Barker," King's imagination warmed. A definite low point was "Garfield-Reeves is the Don Clancy of Horror" (is White Cloud the Don Clancy of toilet paper? The collection is not without its pleasant surprises, however. There's the formerly suppressed blurb that was to have graced Will Talib's *SMALL WORLD*:

"Bart Wood keeps me up all night, but I always take Talib's gun to bed." Regardless of one's opinion on the matter, it is an indisputable fact that King's contribution to the blurb has been most influential. Every one from Alice Cooper to Joe Bob Briggs is trying their hand at it now. Moreover, his legacy guarantees him not only a corner-stone in the annals of the form, but insures,

as well, that more paperback covers shall bear the name of Stephen King than that of any other writer in history.

PITFALL by Ronald Kelly

1990 Zebra/\$3.95
320 Pages

INORDINATELY SKIMP failing a novel's cover design. My business here is critiquing prose, not art, and besides, most writers have little control over what goes on their book's covers. But Zebra's choice of art for *PITFALL* bothers me. A cameo silhouette of a wild thing howling over a wooded lake is all wrong for horror fiction. It belongs on the front of either a Harlequin Romance or a Jack London reissue. Bloodthirsty eyes and jumping jaws are needed here.

Unfortunately, the novel's shortcomings only begin with the cover.

Kelly's story is set in the arid outback of West Texas, in the fictitious town of Sulphur Springs, peopled by a cartoon shillikens, clucked bigots and an allegedly president Apache loner named Bowie Kane, who, despite his sixth-sense, is too dumb to get out of so despicable a place.

Seems some of the local sportsmen have gone from raising phibbils to a particularly malicious breed of Teammanian devil. The creatures are infused with demonic intelligence, gruffed to hocus-pocus Indian mysticism. Their leader, a "pit-devil" named Taz, launches an attack on the human populace, managing—thank God for poetic justice—to eliminate most of the novel's more repellent individuals.

The only thing more wooden than the writing (*the dream of a time of great awakening...as well as an insatiable hunger beyond that which he had ever known*) is the characterization of Bowie Kane. As the novel's one marginally sympathetic figure, much depends on him to make it all worthwhile. But he is unconvincing, even down to the dialogue that Kelly keeps putting into his mouth.

The concept of carnivores as antagonists in a horror yarn is a sort of curious sub-genre to the werewolf motif, a category encompassing such disparate elements as

the killer shrews of the camp movie classic of that name, to *NIGHTMARE*'s vampire bats. Whitley Streiber may have done it best with his early novel *THE WOLFEN*. But with *PITFALL* Ronald Kelly fails to satisfy. His plot is almost viable, yet energy border spent developing characters and better prose is wasted detailing lowlife behavior. The frightening thing about this novel is that it goes on for 320 pages.

THE NIGHTMARE PEOPLE

by Lawrence Sanders
1990 Omy/\$3.95
254 Pages

CONSTRUCTED LIKE A low-budget movie, with a premise right out of *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*, Matthews' novel, for all its faults, is a fairly enjoyable little read.

For one thing, he avoids the attention-numbing blob paragraphs so many horror writers are prone to. Exposition goes way to action in clips of incident and dialogue. This is a copy novel written in a horror milieu.

The plot deals with a group of D.C. apartment dwellers who have been eaten and physically duplicated by monsters. A small band of vigilantes, led by a man with the mundane name of Ed Smith, sets out to destroy them. Naturally, this isn't easy. Not only are bullets useless against the monsters, but the age-old vampire-stopper, the stake through the heart, proves futile as well.

What Evans, for whatever reason, gives the cardboard characters of his novel funny names (a boss named Binar, a neighbor named Attilla). This lends to get irritating at times, but is no real hindrance.

There is not an ounce of precision at work here. The narrative is entirely superficial, a stock case being run through a set course of shocks. Even the gore scenes are handled in brief, if almost roads like a treat-ment to a Savage Remains film.

THE NIGHTMARE PEOPLE produces few, if any genuine chills. Its strength is in its ability to entertain. What Evans is adept at keeping things going. This opening is a grabber, his dialogue mostly sharp, and some- (Continued on page 53)

IT WAS COMFORTABLY sticky for December.

To get the "appointment," I had to wait my way through streets that badly needed lighting, which meant, or perhaps beret. Local Council had seen it to leave to God's natural light. What surprised me more than anything was that there were lamp posts lining the kerb, but ending in stumps where the tops had been crudely sheared off. A few shop windows were still blazing, rectangles of knowledge light upon the cobblestones, allowing me to make at least some semblance of a path towards my destination. One shop was full of toys—but I wondered why it was so full, it being Christmas Day.

The only thing I knew about the man I was to meet was that he lived in this area. And, of course, that did not tell me much. I could not even plumb the darknesses to the attic-top roofs. All I had to go on was a hastily scrawled map passed to me by a hand in the city centre pub. It was the first time I had been there, so my first surprise, in a long line of other surprises, was the recognition of the likes of me by the likes of someone else. I took the scrap of paper, expecting there to be words upon it—so eager in my attempts to read, I did not bother to scrutinize my co-habiter of that one fleeting moment in my life. And as soon as I had seen the lines, arrows, numbers and unconnected letters, he or she had disappeared into the larger rumble at the bar. Different circumstances, and we may have been able to strike up a lasting relationship, or at least an exchange of small talk.

A busbody who happened to be sitting the other side of me turned his attention away from his half-started beer and, with a finger new-moored with dubious filth, pointed at the diagram in my lap.

"That looks like a map of the Dark Side of the City, Mister. Nobody ever goes there, 'cept the people who live there."

"Do you live there, Drunkard?" I was dismayed by the busbody's beard. For it was evidently false....

"Not now, halflight tippler, but once I did."

He went on to describe how the arrows on the map would take me to a man who could give me a fortune—if I was the right man for whom we was seeking. Apparently, this was an old legend of the Dark Parts, where either things were or weren't. This particular individual had "sent out" over the decades for various others, none of whom had been the one he wanted. Who knows, I may indeed be that one, I thought. I trusted that busbody. So I bought him a round of drinks and set off immediately in accordance with the map's directions (so meticulously explained by a near-stranger in a pub with a beard).

Soon, even the blazing shop windows gave out. Luckily, the lambskin, plangent glow from the lighted part of the city did infiltrate, I noticed, as far as these back-doubles, allowing me to feel my way along by warehouse walls. The vestigial garbites sticking out from just above eyeshot looked like coagulants of darkness, clustered together from the distant yellow streetlights. I did not wonder why I thought such things.

The second blind alley on the right. If I were not too much mistaken, would lead me to where the Fleet received his Stunners. Thunder murmured threats of lightning under his hot breath.

There was not a blind alley where the map said it would be—so I had to take the third on the right, instead. Here was more illumination than was good for it—"whiter than the City glow. I could not discern its source, but its subject matter was the most rankable array of mishapen, window-less twoupthreodowns I had ever drended to see. The gutters hung so low, they scraped along the top of my head, through the skull of which could be felt a jekyllish substance jiggling in the tunnels. I deciphered further towards the Dead End.

He was squatting in what appeared to be a kennel of heavenly light, unsullied by any colour. I could not see his face—since he shone a torch of black flame upon it.

"Let me introduce myself, as no one else is likely to do so—my name is Bloodbone. His voice was neutral, neither frightening nor comforting. He fanned out a series of photographs in his hand, bearing what seemed to be black and white snapshots of various cuts of gory butcher's rubble. "Do you recognize any of these?"

"I don't understand, Mr. Bloodbone, I'm afraid."

He withdrew the flickering torch from his face. By his look, I could tell I had failed the test. There was a cruel gash for the mouth where the grey glibet tongue lolled out, an over-nourished tongue turned inside out by a cancerous infection. The eyes opened directly on to the pulsating

Forbidden Teas (Continued from page 52)
times—intentionally or not—the rewards the reader with a dash of wry humor. Read it with some jiffy Pop and a can of Pepsi Lite.

GRIMM MEMORIALS by R. Patrick Gates 1990 Omy/\$4.95

IT IS NO secret that children's literature is an ancient source of seminal terror. Among the lesser-known fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm is one in which the Devil forces a man who has bargained with him to chop the hands off his own daughter. Elsewhere a woman gives birth to mutants, one girl having a long verdopen eye in the middle of her forehead, another having three eyes. Ever-popular are instances of grandine-eating wolves, frog princes and gnomes contriving to possess human offspring.

Gates makes splendid use of the fairy tale as a horror story in *GRIMM MEMORIALS*. An aging witch named Eleanor Grimm, lone descendant of a persecuted morician, is on a quest for innocents to sacrifice in occult rituals. She is aided by a dark force—"the Machine" is her name for it—that enables her to project non-threatening images of herself to others. Eleanor recreates scenes from fairy tales as a means of enchanting

brain, which was incubating blackened cultures even as I watched. The nostrils of the bulldozer-gaped wider with each of Bloodbone's breaths, revealing a whole system of twitching, fatidling bogies, a whole scabby township of them—in varying shades of pure white.

He sighed morosely, as I realized he had unravelled my innards like a leather undergar, a comely wrench just by his eyes. He had been searching desperately for another of his kind, whose bodily parts were black and white...like in the old B-Movie days.

I died in tears.

As the lightning's crazy zigzags paved the night sky, I realized that God must be taking photographs.

and luring her impressionable victims. To write a little boy from the safety of his bedroom, she conjures up a realm of figures from Mother Goose. Under the guise of the Lewis Carroll characters Tweedle-dee and Tweedle-dum she abducts some twins from a shopping mall. By a variety of illusions, adults are caught of guard, distracted from protecting their little ones.

To Steve Nalor, one of the novel's leading characters, Eleanor appears as a sexually-exciting young female; to Nalor's pregnant wife Diane, she appears as Diane's long-dead father, telling her not to have sex with Steve, as it will harm her baby. The resulting tension—Steve's arousal, Diane's coldness—creates the perfect breakdown in defenses for the old witch to work her wiles on the Nalor children.

At its grimmes, the novel deals unflinchingly with cannibalism, necrophilia and torture. Gates draws his characters (even Eleanor at times) sympathetically. The Nalor children are real—they're bricker and tease; their plight involves us.

Tension is built with expert professionalism. Gates occasionally resorts to tricks, as when a crucial note is blown out of sight under a table. Ya, the tricks work here. *GRIMM MEMORIALS* goes places. It moves well. It pays off.

carrying the bird; its head wobbled from her hand.

"It's broken my neck," said Milton. "Put it in the trash and wash your hands. Ginger, birds are full of parasites."

But Ginger begged and pleaded with him, and at last he entreated the little corpse for her and laid it out on a bit of white satin in a shoebox. Anna watched the process, the draining of the blood, the injection with formalin, as she had before. Milton wanted her to know the business. When they had arranged the bird so that it looked nice, they showed it to Ginger and then held a funeral for it.

Broken things. Ginger, reaching and reaching her dirty little fingers into the cookie dough, snatching mouthfuls, sucking her fingers and sticking them back into the dough, no matter how many times Anna told her not to. Finally Anna had taken a wooden spoon, and held one of Ginger's fat little hands on the counter, and—how the child could scream. But Anna hadn't broken Ginger's fingers, or even the skin. She had only been trying to teach Ginger a lesson. Why did she connect this spanking with broken things?

"Mrs. Hutchinson?"

She glanced up. The pain in her stomach felt sharp as shark's teeth, gnawing at her. A small wizened man wearing thick-framed glasses and a doctor's white coat stood there. His lenses strank his eyes; the brown tises were the size of peas. "Mrs. Hutchinson, your daughter...."

"Yes?"

"I'm very sorry," Billie to pay, forms to sign, people she had to convince, yes, Ginger's body should come to Hutchinson's Mortuary. My husband will take care of everything. It was down by the time Anna and Ginger were alone together, and Anna was drooping with exhaustion, and Ginger was silent. And yet—

The small and ginger smile.

Because finally, Ginger would do exactly what Anna wanted her to. Wear what Anna decided on, style her hair as Anna willed, rather than obese, had run out, come back



in the midst of midnight sirens, the fast rocky ride to the emergency room, the checked linoleum waiting-room floor, the stale cigarette smell of pacing and anxiety, the flickering of unbalanced fluorescents, Anna found inside herself a small and private smile.

Her daughter Ginger was somewhere in the building, having her stomach pumped, probably dying. Her husband Milton was at an undertakers' convention in Chicago, and not in his hotel room; he couldn't be reached. Anna sat alone, hugging her stomach, which hurt, and pulling in air, letting it out; it never seemed to reach her lungs. Am I alive? she wondered. What is this gasping thing I have become?

Ginger. Ginger is in there, fighting for her death.

Ginger, my only child.

Ginger, my fat, sultry, intractable, teen-aged daughter.

Ginger, whom I wanted so much to love and cherish.

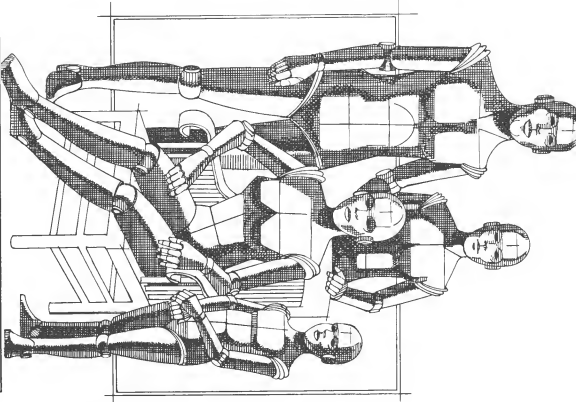
Tears would be right, but they did not come; she only felt the hot prickliness around her eyes, like a view of distant clouds, promising rain somewhere.

She thought of broken things.

Her mother's cold voice, speaking through the locked closet door, while Anna stood there in the coat-muffled, moth-balled darkness, her hands flat against the wood. "You have a willful, evil spirit, Anna. It wants breaking. Think, child. Think about how to be good."

If Anna beat on the door and yelled, they would leave her in there much longer. If she were quiet, they would let her out sooner. And she could stay out, until she did something else Mother and Father thought was wicked.

Broken things. The bird that had flown into their picture window one morning when she and Milton and Ginger were all eating breakfast at the table, enjoying the view of the sun on the yew trees outside. Ginger, then just a little girl, chubby rather than obese, had run out, come back



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BROKEN THINGS (Continued)

mortuary, and a few of the things Anna had found while prowling the hospital, have the figure Anna had always tried to help her have. At last somebody would be the perfect child, the child Anna had never been, the child Ginger had refused to be. Until now.

Thinking of how her parents up in heaven would smile when they saw Ginger, perfect, in her casket, Anna touched her child's cold face and smiled. At last she had something she could mend.

LETTERS (Continued from page 5)

In a previous letter, I mentioned that I had mixed feelings for the work of Harry Fassel. Well, in the past few months, I've had the opportunity to see more of his work and I've grown to become a big fan. Fassel's work in #12 was unsettling and intriguing, and I think it's merely a matter of time before he reaches the level of photo/illustrators like J.K. Potter and Harry O. Morris.

DEATHS DOOR (Continued from page 27)

of what not to do in a work of fiction. As far as the "fact" portion of the magazine, the only really useful piece was K evin J. Anderson's article on creative writing classes. Coming from a fellow who has sold nine novels in three years, I would certainly be inclined to take his advice, or at least listen to what he has to say. The other non-fiction pieces were various reviews on movies and video tapes, none particularly well-written or well-argued.

Beyond what I can only describe as a certain, disturbing feel of this zine promoting some quasi-religious movement (big ads for 900 numbers involving "personal occult, paranormal, etc. experiences"), the complete package was somewhat pleasing. I'll give the whole thing a 5 on a 10-point scale.

DAGGER OF THE MIND #1 • Arthur William Lloyd Breach, 1317 Hook Ridge Dr., El Paso, TX 79925 • 8" x 8" • 62 pages • \$3.50 for single issue, 2-issue sub \$8.00, 4-issue sub \$16.00.

Someone, look at the prices of this magazine, do a little math, and tell me if something doesn't seem somehow amiss.

The packaging of this new horror/dark fantasy offering is very attractive, with an amusing, fantasy-oriented cover, laser-printed text, and generally good page designs. Except for some comic work by Kenneth R. Cheney, Mickey Allen Clausen, and Al Manachino & Duncan, art is virtually non-existent.

Also, there is a noticeable lack of editorial presence here. Mr. Breach appears very impersonal and distant, leaving the magazine with a slightly cold tone. His only editorial is near the end of the magazine, and it's a superficial blurb for **DAGGER**, with the obligatory gup, "we're broadening the way you look at literature and the world around you." Sure.

There is some very nice fiction in the issue, as well as some that fails to rise above mediocrity. I wasn't very taken with the Sidney Williams ("The Rising Force in Horror") piece *Alone*—a very bland message among some excessive verbiage. Margaret Fessley's *The Shattered Window* was not a story, rather, it was a nearly 3,500 summary with no dialogue, breaking no new ground, being, in fact, too reminiscent of Arthur Breach's tale *The Nightmare of Robert Edson Holt* in **DEATHREALM #10**.

Breach's *Return of the White Ship* is a sequel to H.P. Lovecraft's *The White Ship*, and is surprisingly intense and beautifully poetic. A bit overlong for what it has to say, it nevertheless ranks as an honest to God successful Lovecraft pastiche. Barry Hoffman's tale *Unfinished Business* reads very well, with realistic characterization. I found Jamie McGeary's *And They Danced* a tad predictable, but very nicely done and thoroughly enjoyable. Mark Rainey's *Symphonia Maleficus* isn't as pretentious as it sounds; it's an atmospheric tale reminiscent of his *Threnody* in **DEATHREALM #2**.

An interview with Barry Hoffman on censorship and a very good article on Charles Fort "and the creed of doubt" by D. Douglas Graham comprise the non-fiction.

You know, I really like excessive types in a magazine. In this issue, they're everywhere. Editors, I implore you. Procrastinate it's not that difficult! When a reader has to muddle his way through so much shit for type, it doesn't matter how nice your packaging is. Take note.



